ENCHANTMENT

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

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ENCHANTMENT

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The Patchwork Papers
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ENCHANTMENT

BY

E. TEMPLE THURSTON

AUTHOR OF "THE FIVE-BARRED GATE," "THE PASSIONATE CRIME," ETC.

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

NEW YORK 1917

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TO

G. STUART OGILVIE

My Dear Ogilvie,

I shall never forget that day when you came down here like the northeast wind off the Suffolk coast, stirring up the dust in my mind until it rose in clouds, hurtling along the road before me, more valuable a thousand times than a whole bushel of that we pray for in the month of March.

What seeds of ideas you carried in that tempest of your coming, you probably will never fully realize, nor shall I, in a lifetime, be able to prove my gratitude for.

Here, anyhow, is a story, with some of the full blood in it that I know warms the cockles of your heart, and I put your name to it to prove to you and to others that I am not ungrateful when a high wind blows and brings me such a friend as you.

Yours always sincerely,

E. Temple Thurston.

Tredington Court,
February, 1916.

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BOOK I

THE BIRTH OF THE PRINCESS

"Soon afterwards a little daughter was born to her, who was as white as snow, and red as blood, and with hair as black as ebony; . . . and when the child was born the mother died."

Grimm's Fairy Tales.

I

ONCE UPON A TIME

"PUT the saddle on the gray mare," said the old cook, "and go down into the street for the doctor."

"What'll I be doin' if 'tis the way he's not inside?" asked the boy.

"If ye don't find him in twenty minutes there'll be a corpse is to be buried," said she—"and maybe a child with it. Shure, she's asking the Lord God mightn't she be dead already; and I dunno, if I was the Lord God meself, wouldn't I listen to her. Isn't it the tenth she's had, and she not givin' an aisy birth to one of them. Yirra! will ye go now, and not stand listenin' to me talking. I dunno what I'm saying at all, and that's the way with me. Put the saddle on the gray mare, for the love of God, and go down like a shtreak for the doctor."

Feeling in all possibility that she would say more, she walked out of the kitchen, wiping the perspiration off her face with her apron, and knocked at the dining-room door.

It was near midnight, but there was a voice to answer her. To the incoherent sounds that it uttered, she entered. In a leather armchair, before a log and peat fire that was burnt to red and gray ashes, there reclined a man, not more than forty years of age. Insecurely in his hand he held a tumbler of punch, on which the rind of lemon floated near the edge and threatened to overflow. On the table beside him stood a black bottle of whiskey, a bowl of sugar and a half-peeled

lemon from which he had cut the rind. In the ashes at his feet a blackened kettle simmered to the heat still clinging in the peat and logs. A thin thread of steam was flickering from the spout.

"She's begun her torments," said the cook.

He raised his glass, spilling its contents before it reached his lips.

"God bless her!" said he magnificently.

"And I'm after sending for the doctor," the cook continued, "because she'll never over it this time."

All movement of his body seemed to be arrested as the cook said this. The glass stopped halfway to his lips. His eyes took into them a light of unnatural sobriety. His limbs of a sudden lost their looseness and stiffened to a strange rigidity.

"In the name of God, what's happened her?" he whispered.

" 'Tis what happens to a whole power of women," said the cook, "when they're sick and tired of the birth-bed. Isn't it easier to die? It is, of course, and she lying there with her tenth."

"By God! They didn't all live," said he.

"They did not, but that didn't save 'em from being born," said she.

"I swear to God, if he lives," he exclaimed, "he shall be a priest."

"As like as not," said the cook, " 'twill be a girrl."

In the fervor of his unnatural sobriety he swore again that in such a case the child should go into a convent.

"It won't help the birth," said the cook.

They stood there in the high-ceilinged dining-room, with the candles flickering on the table, the glass of punch steaming in his hand, the wind howling outside in a southern gale

as it beat its way through the winter branches of the trees, and they listened to the clattering hoofs of the old gray mare as she raced with all the wild tumult of the storm down the drive, until the sound of her going was swallowed up in the wind.

"It won't help the birth," said the cook again.

"But it'll please God," said he in an agony of soberness and of soul. "It'll please God, and maybe then she'll over it this night."

When a man is driven to such a pass as this, there must be lovable qualities in him elsewhere, to earn the compassion of a cook whose attentions are torn between the saucepan on the kitchen fire and a dying woman on her bed of childbirth upstairs. She glanced at him in a moment of pity.

" 'Tis no good, the world knows," said she—" 'tis no good to be driving a bargain with the Lord God."

"Then I'll drive no bargain," said he. "If 'tis a girl she shall go into a convent, and the Almighty God may do what he likes with me." Having said which, and thereby having made slight reservations in the event of a boy, he threw back his head and looked his Creator straight in the face.

Such a way as this to begin a fairy tale, without so much as "Once upon a time"! Such a way as this to tell how spells were cast on the princess of a poor kingdom that strange winter's night when she was born!

Never a witch a-riding on her broom, nor talk of fairies gathering round her bed; never a queen on silken cushions nor a king in his golden crown; but a wretched woman in the throes of her agony, a miserable man startled into a chill sobriety from his burnt-out fire, and a gray mare galloping into the darkness and the clamor of the storm.

Yet such and no less is the very beginning of my fairy tale, where there shall be as much of magic and unearthly spells, as much of adventure and of true romance, as in those stories children dream about in bed, when the candle is blown out and the firelight creeps so softly to its feet and sets to dancing on the ceiling up above.

II

THE COURT PHYSICIAN

AMONGST all the fairy tales you have ever read, there are some that make mention of the court physician. Without exception, if my memory serves me as a memory should, he is pictured always in long, flowing robes, bent and with a gray beard that reaches wellnigh to his knees. That conception is quite proper. Such a man is all that a court physician ought to be. But they are not always like that.

The court physician of this tale of ours is not that kind at all. To begin with, when a man has to bestride himself on the back of an old mare and ride odd miles on a winter's night, down roads, moreover, no Rural District Council has ever so much as cast its eyes upon, then a flowing robe is an impediment no court physician would suffer for a single moment. Even if he began his career with it, in order to be in the picture, so to speak, the very first midwifery case that came along and dragged him out of bed at two in the morning would find him flinging it to one side. A simple flannel shirt is cause enough for damnation at such a time. And even that is sometimes discarded.

His long beard, too, picturesque though it may have been,

is no longer worn by court physicians of today. Some foolish idea that such an adornment carries infection in its flowing strands has crept into practice, and though I have known an Irish country doctor to lance an abscess with a penknife he took straight out of his trousers pocket, he will not wear a flowing beard. That would, he would tell you, be courting disaster. He is more advanced in hygiene than that.

You cannot expect the world to stand still when it is telling its fairy tales, for even a fairy tale must march with the times. If rules of hygiene have become the vogue since Grimm and Hans Andersen wrote for their listening children, no modern fairy tale can ignore them, if it is to catch the ears of the listening children today.

Most willingly would I garb my court physician in the flowing robes his brothers wore in the days of long ago, but that occasion when the gray mare went clattering down the drive at midnight, losing the thunder of her hoofs in the clamor of the storm, was no more than forty odd years ago. Far though he was, in that little village outside the town of Waterford, from marching with the times, Doctor O'Connor would never have attended a case of maternity at such an hour, dressed in a robe that, like as not, would have flung him on his face the very first step he took to mount his horse. As for a long beard—well, to begin with, it would not have suited his type of countenance at all.

But all this is not to say that he was utterly without those abilities of magic which stamp themselves upon your memory the moment the court physician comes into the room.

One quality at least he had, which must commend him for his magic to any listening child whose eyes should chance upon these pages. And I care not how ultra-modern that child may be, once she has read the things I have to tell, she must confess that never was there a man more marvelously

set out for the character of a court physician in a fairy tale than this same Doctor O'Connor in his gloomy house that hid behind the cedar-trees—and, for all I know, may hide there still—in that little village of Portlaw.

This was the quality he had.

At the point of his nose—the tint of which, being a doctor, he knew, though others denied it, was due to indigestion—there always hung a little drip, over which he had such magical control as was little short of marvelous.

Not in all the experiences of those who needed his services, or met him on the roads, or saw him in his own gloomy house behind the cedar-trees, had anyone ever seen it fall. More than that, no one had ever seen him wipe it away. By a series of little sniffs, regulated and controlled as finely as the finest modern balance you see swinging on an agate stone, he was always its master, even at the critical instant of its impending fall.

I have watched it myself, my eyes riveted upon it in a fatal and morbid fascination, convinced, as when you watch the juggler playing with his cannon-ball, that every moment was its last. Sometimes I have almost imagined that he liked to play upon your feelings, even to such an extent as when passing beyond the bounds of all control you might exclaim, "Look out!" Then, just at that psychological moment when you felt you could bear it no longer, he would introduce the salvation of his little, quick, concerted sniffs and let you breathe again.

If this is not approaching such magic as should qualify any physician for a place in a fairy story, I don't know what is. And if there are any reading these pages who object to it, who declare it is not the sort of magic to make up the wonder of a fairy tale, then they must just pass on, or, better still, fling the book away. For this was the court

physician to whose door the gray mare came a-snorting that hour of midnight when the princess made her piteous way into the world, to find the spell already cast upon her by no other person than the king, her father.

The boy leapt off the gray mare, tied her to the railing and, disappearing through the cedar-trees, knocked loud and long on the doctor's door.

It was fully three minutes before a window opened directly above the hall door, and Doctor O'Connor looked out. There he was in his night-shirt, with the drip at the end of his nose in imminent danger—to anyone who did not know his magic—of falling on the boy's upturned face.

"What the hell——?" said he.

" 'Tis Mrs. Desmond," said the boy.

"And what in the name of God's the matter with her now?" inquired the doctor.

"She's with her torments and a child," replied the boy.

"And that's three days too soon," the doctor said. "Shure 'tis enough to tire the Lord God!" And he shut the window with such a slam as nearly took the drip off his nose.

III

THE KING'S PALACE

IT was a matter of waiting five minutes, for nowadays when a court physician is disturbed from his honest slumbers at midnight it will take him as long as this, and sometimes longer, to heap on his clothes and start on his journey, even though it leads him to the birth of a princess.

Following his strict instructions from the cook, the boy waited, going to the assistance of the doctor when he came

downstairs cursing for a light as he stumbled out into the stables.

"Don't contint yeerself with wakin' him up," the cook had said—"Wait—'tis I'm tellin' ye—wait till ye see him downstairs, the time he'd be goin' to get that old horse of his out of the stables. 'Tis like as not he'll want ye to give him a hand; and if he fetches ye a clout over the head instead of givin' ye a penny—for 'tis a mane old divil he is entirely —ye must put up with it. There's that poor creature upstairs is suffering more pains in her body than ever he'd put into yeer head with twenty shtrokes of his fist."

And all this the boy did, saying nothing when, as the cook prognosticated, his ears were boxed because he could not find the saddle which the doctor had put away in its proper place for the first time in twenty years. And this, you who have had to look for things mislaid, know is nearly as good as losing them altogether.

When once the horse was out on the road and the doctor had run back into the house again at the last minute for his bag of instruments, yet a second time had run back for his hat and a bottle of iodoform, they set off for a ride of two miles and more to Waterpark.

Along the hard road the beating of their horses' hoofs was swallowed up in the storm, sounding no more through the howling of the wind than as the faint ticking of that little insect that hides itself in the bedpost and summons the minds of those who dwell within the house to thoughts of death.

Nigh on two miles, through a belt of elm and beech trees, the road divided, and only a black iron gate barring the way proclaimed the fact that this was the entrance to private grounds.

Bending over the neck of his unsaddled horse, the boy unslipped the catch of the gate, and from long custom the

gray mare pushed it open before her. As they rode up the lightless drive under the trees, the clank of the gate swinging to was like the noise of a prison bolt shooting into its hollow socket in the wall.

" 'Tis the hell of a night," whispered the doctor under his breath, and then rode on in silence behind the boy.

It was half a mile through a dense and unkempt growth of wood that the drive up to the lonely house wound like a forgotten road. At the entrance, where the black iron gate was swung and caught on a pair of rough wooden posts, there stood two gray stone pillars, like monuments to an opulence long fallen to decay. The iron hooks, on which hung some former gate of grander proportions, still protruded out of the lichened stone, but the copings had returned to dust where the mortification of the winds and rain had fast set in.

Through the surface of the drive the grass grew thick, and only where the hoofs of horses and the wheels of carts had mown it down did the white faces of the stones prick out the uneven way.

So, at least, it was twenty years ago; so it may well be now. The undergrowth grew thickly almost to the road's edge, and midway on that lonely path, in a slight clearing of the wood, there lay the black water of a stagnant pool. Up to the fringe of it, in the dark, damp soil of sodden leaves, the leaning trees crept close and peered down at their own reflections. Further into the water, the rushes grew, that on winter's evenings, with their pale dead spikes, were like the ghosts of spears that drowned men's hands were thrusting from their graves.

As they passed the pool and the clearing in the trees, the boy pressed his knees into the flanks of the gray mare and shot forward through the darkness with his eyes bent rigidly before him. At that moment the moon tore a rent in

the scudding clouds, and, as the doctor looked over his shoulder through the trees, the face of it was mirrored in the black surface of the pool.

"God Almighty!" he whispered, and sniffed at the drip on his nose. With all the common sense he possessed, he knew it was the moon; but with something that Nature has planted in all Irishmen, and bestowed in her generosity on some others besides, it was the face of a woman, and she dead, and the cheeks of her were bloodless white and her hair was matted in the reeds.

He, too, drove his knees and clapped his heels into the flanks of the horse he rode, and the instruments in his old black bag clattered like a lot of bones, under the moaning trees, as he chased up the grass-grown road after the vanishing figure of the boy.

Some yards from the house came the end of the wood, when it opened out into the dreary stretch of fields and meadows known as Waterpark.

The house had its name from the land, not the land from the house, as is ever the way in Ireland. On a slightly rising piece of ground it stood, a square, gaunt, weather-slated place, with such numbers of rooms as would have accommodated the retinue of half the kings in fairyland.

But kings, as well as court physicians, must make their way with the times, and if the times are bad, as in Ireland it has become the habit of the times to be, then retinues must be cut down and crown jewels sold to the highest bidder. Long had they been sold at Waterpark, cattle and land and straight-limbed trees, and I know not what besides.

For there is no knowing what are jewels or what is the common stone, when you come to be talking of fairy crowns on the head of a fairy king.

Even on such a night as this, when the first shrill cries

of the little princess were to be trembling through the great house and scattering like flecks of chaff before the roaring thunder of the wind outside, even then there was only one window above and one below, in all that array of eyes with which a great house looks out upon the world about it, where a glimmer of light shot out between the cracks in the broken shutters.

The doctor looked up at the weather-slated walls and shuddered as he dropped off his horse to the ground.

"'Tis the darkest damned place!" said he, and he tied his reins to the foot-scraper, while he felt in all his pockets for the bottle of iodoform.

The boy threw open the hall door. A candle was burning on the table that stood in the middle of an open space, at the far end of which a great staircase could be seen winding out of sight to the rooms above.

"Mind that light!" cried the doctor.

He was too late.

The wind had caught it, as it catches a wandering leaf, and flung it into darkness.

"Is that the doctor?" the cook's voice inquired over the banisters at the top of the stairs.

"It is," said the boy.

"Then bring him up!" said she,"and tell him to mind the carpet is torn in a gap of a hole on the third step."

A princess must be born. Not even in the olden fairy tales did she come out of nowhere, without the uncertain glories of that accident of birth.

And if there is a hole in the carpet on the third step of the stairs in her father's palace, what does that matter, so long as the doctor does not trip over it and break his neck?

Rather than that such a terrible catastrophe as this might happen, the cook had warned him of that. He came, feeling

with both hands, into the darkness of the hall and passed up the stairs in safety.

IV

A KING IN MUNSTER

IN times gone by, before the marauding sword of Essex had ripped the purple from their shoulders, the Desmonds were kings in Munster. Even now they are kings, but of poorer kingdoms, and the purple that hangs upon their shoulders has degenerated to a drab and faded tweed. The royal garter is a buckskin gaiter, needing buttons often and besmeared with mud as well. They have changed their crown for a soft cloth hat, which any usurper can buy by the dozen at O'Callaghan's in the town of Waterford, though none can wear it as a Desmond can.

He is a king, then, in the right of kings, and king enough for any fairy tale, this same John Desmond, standing unsteadily alone in that cheerless, high-ceilinged room, the dining-room at Waterpark. Unsteadily, now again, for no sooner had the sound of the gray mare's hoofs been swallowed up in the storm and he knew the responsibilities of a dying woman would shortly be on the doctor's shoulders—no sooner, indeed, had the first shock of it shaken him to that sudden, chill sobriety, than he stretched out his hand for the glass of punch set down upon the table and raised it automatically to his lips.

With one eye appearing odd and twisted through the steaming liquid, he had looked through his glass at the cook.

"Hannah," he had said, with a deep earnestness, "here's to herself, and may she over it."

In answer to that toast Mrs. Slattery had bent her head, making a generous sign of the cross where there was ample room for it on her spacious bosom.

To prepare for the doctor's coming, she had left him, then; and there he sat, drinking one glass after another in the dim, grim light of the dying fire and the two tall candles that feebly illumined the darkness in the lonely room.

The sleep was at his very elbow, nodding his head, when the sound of the horses returning stirred him to the remembrance of the desperate nature of events. With an effort to come to his feet, he sank back again in his chair, and four several times repeated the attempt. By the time he had succeeded and reached the door into the hall, the doctor was safely past the third step on the stairs and had reached the landing up above.

In a helpless despair, feeling blindly about him in the impenetrable darkness of the hall, he turned, over-swiftly, at the sound of a noise behind him, and stumbled into the arms of the boy.

"Mother of God!" he cried in a sudden agony and sweat of fear, for it seemed to his bewildered brain, and in that encompassing blankness, that the devil of all mischance was at his heels and he had fallen into the pits of hell.

" 'Tis all right, sorr," whispered the boy—" 'tis all right."

In the reassuring knowledge that there was a human being to keep him company, he seized hold of the boy's arm and dragged him into the dining-room. Thick shrouds of wax were dropping from the candles' wicks and all glimmer of ashes in the fire was dead. But it was a brighter room to him, now that some other being shared its occupancy with himself.

Yet, still in a sweat of fear, he seized his glass and turned round on the boy.

"Talk to me," he whispered—"talk to me. Call me a drunken old devil if ye like, the way I can fetch ye a clout over the head for yeer impudence. Oh, shure, man, say something, can't ye?"

In the dim light of those two candles, the boy stood there in the lofty room, his tongue gripped fast in silence.

John Desmond sat down in his armchair and stared at him. His lips were beginning to tremble; an unnatural light was sparkling in his eyes. In another moment the confidence of his own being would have fled out of him, like some beast in terror running wild, when he seized upon the first words that came out of his remaining reason to his lips.

"Did ye milk the cows?" he cried out.

"I did, sorr," trembled the boy.

"Is there anything else ye done?"

"Shure, I cleaned out the stable, and didn't I cut a truss of hay for the gray mare?"

"Well, why the devil didn't ye say so! That's talking, isn't it? I didn't ask ye to say what ye thought, being no use to me. Go on—go on—say more what ye did. I must have the noise of one and he speakin', or the storm of that wind'll drive me to a holy terror of death."

With a quivering voice, the boy stood there, plucking at his hat and telling of all the things he had done that day, never knowing what moment the hand of his master might not be falling about his ears for the things he had left undone! Wherefore, with the inherent instincts of self-protection, he gave such an account of his labors as might have taken a week to perform and as made John Desmond look at him in amazement.

"And what is it I pay ye for doin' all that in one day?" he asked at last.

"Four shillings a week, sorr."

"'Tis a starvation wage," said John Desmond, "for a boy is as industrious as yerself." And thrusting his hand into his pocket, he brought out a piece of gold, the only money he had in the house.

"Ye can spit on that," said he, "for 'tis a good boy ye are——" and there he stopped.

In the hall outside had come to his ears the sound of the doctor's voice. He gripped the arms of his chair and set his eyes upon the door. A moment later it opened, and O'Connor entered with Hannah, the cook, at his heels; and to the last day of his life, John Desmond remembered the glitter of the candle-light in a heavy tear which was at that moment in the course of rolling down Mrs. Slattery's face.

V

THE CURSE UPON JOHN DESMOND

IT is incumbent upon us, no less than upon kings and queens as upon court physicians, to march along the road of life in company with the times. And though there may seem little of magic in our modern fairly tale when you come to compare it with three-leagued boots and wishing-rings and flying carpets, yet magic is there, but so close at our elbow as to be out of all perspective.

There is nothing so full of magic as reality; but just because some dunderhead has shuffled the issues up in a basketful of modern words and new-fashioned terminologies, we have come to regard an express train as a far less wonderful thing than a pair of three-leagued boots. We take a ticket to Kamchatka and thrust it in our ticket-pockets as though it were nothing more than a piece of cardboard, when, if it

were a wishing-ring, we should be putting it breathlessly upon our fingers and turning it every other minute of the day.

The pity of it is that wonder has gone out of the eyes of a man before knowledge has crept in. He is like a child who has been permitted a glimpse behind the scenes, and having seen the crude reality of ropes and pulleys, of changing lights and shifting canvases, can no longer enjoy the magic of the story on the stage.

Dragging the weary feet of an old man, he comes out of the theater of Life, crying for reality. It is a new word, wherefore he thinks it is a new thing; and a new thing is a new toy, which, being still a child, he thinks more to be desired than any other thing beside.

But you can no more disguise the old meanings of life with the new words of man's invention, than you can put old wine into new bottles.

Reality is the same magic as of old, the selfsame magic as when Scheherazade sat telling her tales to the Sultan in Bagdad, the same as when Jack was a Giant-Killer and Cinderella rode in her fairy coach to the ball.

And John Desmond, crowned in a poor kingdom, lurching unsteadily to his feet in the sweat of fear, as those two stood before him in that lonely room where the shrieking gusts of the storm were moaning in the broken shutters, was as much a man in the sport and craft of witches as any king in fairyland awaiting his fate to be told from the stew of frogs and bats and the livers of white owls that simmered in a witch's cauldron.

It matters little to call it reality when a man is drunk in body and wits, when the candles blow to a thin blue flame and the frenzied voices of the storm are shouting terror and confusion in his ears. These are the true elements of sor-

cery and enchantment, without which no fairy tale could ever be written, and no other princess could be born with such a spell upon her life as was cast that night upon Patricia Desmond.

With one hand gripping the mantelpiece, against which he leant the burden of his weight, John Desmond stared at these two as they stood before him.

One after another the tears were rolling down Mrs. Slattery's face, whereby he knew how critical were the issues of life and death in that room upstairs, if, indeed, they had not already been decided. Yet, for the first few moments, with an odd perversity of his brain, he could only stand there in a senseless stupor, calculating whether or no the drip was going to fall from the doctor's nose upon the carpet.

With a supreme effort to collect his scattered wits, he put the perversity from him and, in a breaking whisper, asked them what it was that brought them there, with a woman upstairs crying in her torment.

"'Tis a sairious matter," began the doctor; and here the tears that were just softly flowing out of Mrs. Slattery's eyes, burst the flood-gates that held them and, with a moaning cry she could not keep from her lips, poured down her cheeks in two shining torrents, till the whole rotundity of her face appeared as if it had been dipped in brine.

John Desmond caught at his breath and cast one glance at the tumbler of whisky still steaming on the table. If the worst had come to the worst, he knew that no such straw could save him in that moment from the drowning of despair. With the contempt a man of spirit has for his follies when life is at a crisis, he turned from it and looked straight into the sober though watery eyes of the little doctor.

"Out with it!" he exclaimed angrily, knowing how con-

temptible he was as he stood there swaying before them. "Out with it! There's the hell of a lot of talking in this house and little done! Is she dead?"

He had no consideration for the fact that the talking had been his and all the doing theirs in that room stifled with the presence of death. This was the intolerance of a high spirit besotted with drink, yet sober enough to be ashamed of his own drunkenness.

"Out with it!" he repeated. "Is she dead?"

"She is not," replied the doctor; "but I wouldn't give the toss of a penny coin itself to say would she be living at the latter end of this night."

"What d'ye mean by that?" inquired John Desmond under his breath. "Good God, man! Can ye save her with yeer old bottles and knives, or can't ye?"

It was then that the doctor said the terrible thing, the thing that John Desmond, devout Catholic even in his cups, had dreaded a whole nine separate times in his life before this.

" 'Tis a matter of losing the mother or child," said he grimly; "and I'm waiting to know from yeerself, John Desmond, which it is to be. Will ye pull yeerself together now, for the love of God; and if 'tis abiding bi the laws of the Holy Church ye are, will ye come upstairs and hold the hand of the poor creature before she goes her suffering ways out of this world."

If there is more terrible a curse could fall upon any man in any tale of magic that would be keeping you awake on a windy night when the fire was low and the candles blowing dim, I for one have no knowledge what that curse might be. The old hag seated by the roadside, the witch with her cauldron in that dreadsome cabin in the wood, I have never read that these have uttered any imprecation more malevo-

lent than that which the Holy Church declared upon John Desmond that stormy night.

The whole of his Fate was abroad and set loose upon him then; for not only must he face the anathema of the Church, but the turn of his luck was out and up against him, too.

In more competent hands both mother and child might have been saved; but life is a precarious thing, as they know well who have seen an Irish country practitioner with nothing between his skill and the grave but a dirty black bag and a rattling bundle of instruments.

And the doctor knew this as surely as he knew it was beyond his power to save them both. There was the lack of his skill to hide, and it was a simple matter enough to convince an old woman and distract the mind of a drunken man, by the intrusion of such vital issues as these. One who must decide between himself and God has no time to be considering who placed him in such a predicament.

John Desmond clutched at the collar about his throat, and in the silence before he spoke the whole house fell to a death-like stillness in a sudden lull of the storm. His eyes wandered from the doctor to the cook, from the cook to the boy, now sniveling in ignorant apprehension as he crouched in a corner by the door. From none of these was there help, whereupon, like a good Catholic, he cried out in a loud voice for the priest.

"Let the father come here to me now!" he shouted. "The way if I've got to choose my own damnation, I shall know what sort it is at all. Send the priest to me, I'm saying! Shure, if there's damnation for me and she living, won't I be damned entirely and she dead? Bring the priest to me here while I'd be asking him the rights of that, for there's no woman breathing can keep me off the drink I'd be taking,

like herself. Isn't it these days while she'd be sick in her bed and I sitting lonesome in this starvin' house, isn't it these days I'd be taking a drop and she not looking at all?"

He appealed with both hands to Mrs. Slattery, and when he found he needed one for support, thrust out the other like a child, and it begging. There were tears in her eyes, in her throat, and her bosom was drenched with them. She could only nod in reply.

"Well, then, where's the priest, in the name of God?" he cried out; and, armed with this assurance from a woman who knew well what she was talking about, he stumbled across the room, seizing the terrified boy by the collar of his coat and swinging him round upon his feet.

"Let ye go now on the back of the old mare," he stammered, "and ride like sin for Father Casey. Tell him the devil has got hold of the hind-leg of John Desmond, and 'tis aiqual to the deuce which way he pulls, for there's damnation on both sides of him and he cryin' out for the help of God. Tell him——"

It was here that the doctor interposed, sniffing nervously at his drip, till it had almost disappeared altogether.

"There's no time," said he—"there's no time, John Desmond, to be sending for the priest, and he in his house is a four-mile step from this door. There's no time, I'm tellin' ye. Isn't she on the points of death itself now, the time we'd be standing here talking. Yirra, man, pull yeerself together and let me know which it is to be. 'Tis a responsibility I won't take on me own shoulders, not if ye paid me the fee of a doctor in London itself."

"Then is it meself is to say?" muttered John Desmond, and he spoke like a man who was making his way to the scaffold, with the reluctant absolution of the Church and the curse of God at his elbow.

" 'Tis no man else," declared the doctor.

In that still moment of dread suspense, while the storm was lulled, the boy no longer whimpered and even the sobbing of Mrs. Slattery was caught back in her throat, the wretched man stood fighting with his bemuddled wits against all those years of training in the fear of God and the awe of superstition deep down in the very nature of his soul.

This was the time when, against a thousand odds, a man had chance, if ever he had, to declare himself a king, no matter how woeful the poverty of his kingdom. And out of the enveloping blackness of his soul the spirit of John Desmond took that chance. As the furious clamor of the storm broke out again and raced and chased around the weather-slated house once more, he lifted his voice above it all and cried aloud the choice he made.

"By God!" he shouted, "a woman who has made her soul as sweet as she has on her bed up there is a better thing blessed and living than a poor devil the like of meself, and he cursed and dead. Go up to her now with yeer bottles and knives—go up and save her, man, and don't shtand there sniveling with yeer drippin' nose! Isn't it meself would be destroyed entirely, while ye'd be getting yeer pound or yeer two pound maybe for the pass ye've brought on me this night?"

In a fear lest, with his gathering wits, John Desmond should be coming at the truth, the little doctor hurried from the room, calling to Mrs. Slattery as he went. But there she hung one moment back to fling her arms about her master's neck.

"I—don't care—is it—the Church!" she sobbed, though she would never have had the courage to make such choice herself, nor did she believe there lived a man in those parts possessing it. "I don't care is it—the Church, but

I know the Almighty God 'll bless ye this night." And sucking the hot tears in between her lips as she breathed, she turned out of the room after the doctor.

So again the master and the boy were left alone, and staggering back to his chair by the gray, dead fire, John Desmond beckoned to the shivering boy to come there to his side.

"D'ye know what I've done?" he began in a whisper —"d'ye know what I've done?" And there in that gaunt, great room, with its flickering candles and its burnt-out fire, he sat telling the boy the beauties he knew of in a woman's soul; and every now and again into the far breaking of the night the storm kept tearing the slates off the house and flinging them with the clatter of broken plates upon the metaled surface of the drive.

VI

DRINKING A HEALTH

IT is not much that a boy knows of the beauties of a woman's soul; and when they are described for him in the stilted language of a drunken man, at times mumbled and incoherent and again loud and emphatic, as when John Desmond raised his voice above the storm, it is, to say the best of it, but a shapeless confusion that reaches his mind.

Yet, if after that night the boy was none the wiser concerning the subtle beauties and intricate meanings of a woman's soul, at least when the storm had broken and by the time the morning was pricking its light through the damaged shutters there had been produced in his mind a

tangled impression of a fearless heart under the jacket of a generous Irish gentleman.

He was conscious after that night, and for long after the time when the sovereign which lay tight and secure in his pocket had been spent, that he would go to any lengths to serve his master. And though there often were moments when John Desmond put the fear of God into him so that he trembled as he stood, yet he never lost the memory of that night.

Indeed, events had by no means accumulated to their final crisis when the morning light began piercing its way through the shutters and John Desmond, with all his memories spent, was seated with his face buried in his hands, sobered in prayer. To such resources men inevitably come who have wrestled with God through the burden and terror of the night.

Yet there was more to be dreaded by him before the sun was up or the drifting wreckage of clouds had cleared from the stormy sky. As time went on and there came no message from the room above, he opened the door of the dining-room into the hall and stood there listening for those sounds a man must read events by when the doors are closed against him and he is nothing but a helpless waiting thing. Footsteps he heard, but no more—the tireless, heavy tread of Mrs. Slattery's feet as she moved about in the room, sometimes hasty, sometimes standing for long whiles in silence. At last he crept upstairs, dragging with him the boy by the arm, for company.

Together they stood outside the door on the draughty landing, listening with long-held breaths to the sounds within. Few words were spoken between those two as they battled with life in the midst of death. Now came a sharp order and a curse from the doctor's lips, later a moan from Mrs.

Slattery's, then that helpless cry of a woman who is losing hope, with the sand of her endurance fast running out to the last thin stream.

With each and all these sounds, the boy could feel his master's fingers grip like the teeth of a trap of steel upon his arm. Yet he said no word, nor murmured, nor made one other sign to show that he had heard. But a sound there came at last, thin and fragile and unearthly in its beginning, lifting as it crept into the sounds of the house, lifting to the complaining tremor of the human note. It was the cry of a child, the first faint lamentation of the soul as it enters the doors of life. For with a princess born into her father's kingdom, no less than with the child of a beggar who creeps into life through the hedgerows that skirt the king's highway, there is always this cry of a soul's complaint as it comes out of the timeless nowhere into the appointed day.

At that sound, John Desmond stood up and took the shoulders of the boy in both his hands.

"'Tis all right," said he, and he let go the breath he held—"'tis all right. Didn't he say he'd save herself, and hasn't he saved the child as well! Well, isn't that surely the blessing of God, the way no man should be called upon to say ought any creature live or die. Come downstairs with me now, for ye've been a good boy to me this night—come downstairs, and we'll take another little drop to drink the health of the creature is cryin' in there."

Whereupon, without waiting to hear more, when, if he had, no thoughts of drinking healths would have come into his mind, he went downstairs again to the dining-room and poured out the last drop of whisky from the black bottle and lifted his glass.

"Open those shutters!" he cried out to the boy. "Open

those shutters, and let's have the sun! Open those windows, the way the holy terrors of this night can blow out and the morning blow in! And now," said he, when it was all done and the dazzling sunlight was lying in squares of gold upon the floor, "here's to the health of that divil of a fella upstairs." For it seems without doubt that he was determined to come out with the best of the bargain. Concerning a girl he had made a solemn oath to the Almighty God, and knew he must keep it. He had made no such oath about a boy. So to a boy he drank, standing up there in the sunny room, now as sober as any judge, when many another man in his shoes, and after such a night, would have been nursing an aching head.

Having swallowed a great draught of the whisky as easily as a child drinks water out of a cup, he raised his glass once more.

"Here's a fine health to him," said he, "and may he sit straight on a horse—if," he added, "so be there's a horse in the stable."

"There's the gray mare," said the boy, thinking how she had carried him to the doctor's house, and omitting all calculation of the years she must wait before a man-child, born that night, would be flinging his leg over a saddle.

"May I break my neck at the first ditch," said John Desmond proudly, "if I can't give him a better beast than that." And though the last piece of gold in the house was at that moment lying in the boy's pocket, there was he talking as though the mint itself were in the next room.

"He shall have a roan mare," he went on, and with his love of horseflesh and a romantic imagination, in two minutes would have bred out of his fancy the finest beast that ever took a bit between its teeth; but at that moment a sound fell on their ears. The hand still raised that held his glass

came slowly downwards, till the whisky was spilling on the floor and all the blood crept quickly from his face as he listened. It was the sound of a woman coming heavily downstairs, sobbing at every step, moaning, with that cry in the throat which, in Ireland, has the meaning of but one thing.

She was coming to the door. He knew she was coming to the door, and there he stood waiting to learn the thing his apprehension already knew.

After an eternity of time, it swung slowly open, and there stood Mrs. Slattery, a disheveled and disordered figure, with scarce vitality enough to lift her head. Drooping and clutching at the handle of the door, she stood there, while from deep out of the anguish of her heart there came those chilling cries which scarce have human note in them, but are like some wounded beast that cannot wrest its eyes from death.

"She's dead!" whispered John Desmond—"is that it? She's dead?"

Mrs. Slattery bent her head, and with it her body bent, her knees as well, when, like an empty sack, she fluttered with a sigh to the ground, and in a patch of sunlight lay there still, no more than a heap of clothes upon the floor.

VII

A TAILPIECE

IT was enough in the primitive fairy tale for things to happen. No one cared, it seemed, how or why they came to pass. With great to-doings in the king's palace, with a gathering of fairies, perhaps—in the guise of old women—bringing their gifts to the royal bedside, a princess

was born, and the news of it was spread abroad as if by magic. It was sufficient for a trumpeter to blow a blast from the battlements of the palace and the whole country knew the glad tidings for leagues and leagues around.

Then, before you could say "Jack Robinson," which was the name you took in vain in those days, suitors were hammering their blows on the castle gates, and the little princess was all ready for the lover who, with his deeds of magic or of valor, should win her for the life that was to be happy ever after.

This sort of thing in fairy tales will not satisfy the listening children of today. They are not content with such rapid marching of events as this. Gather them about you on a Christmas night, when the fire flames are licking round the elm-tree logs, that hour when the house is still before candles and lamps are lit, and just see whether you can carry them with you across the years like that.

They won't stand it, I tell you. Before you have got one step upon your way, a voice will rise out of the shadows and you are bound to answer it. No cunning of evasion will serve you then. You must say what happened to the princess from that day when the fairies of chance were gathered about her bed, and if you do not know, then swiftly, in the sweat of imagination, you must invent something, or as surely will you lose that believing look in the eye, that breath of expectancy in the half-opened mouth. One by one about you the listening children will slink away, for the story will no longer please them, and you will be left alone—a disappointed fellow, I strongly suspect—well knowing you have lost the old trick you had, the trick of keeping the listening children all spellbound at your side.

And it is all your fault, not theirs. To tell the truth, though you have not the courage to do so, you are getting

old—too old to see that the scene is changing as you trudge your way along the road of life.

It was enough in our young days for the trumpeter one moment to blow his blast from the palace walls, and in the next for the dust of the suitors' horses to be seen rising over the hill. It mattered little to you who all the suitors were, so long as the Prince Charming was there amongst them. It brought you no anxiety to hear what had happened to the princess all those years while she had been growing up.

But that sort of thing will not do now at all. Patricia Desmond, born in the sun of that early morning when the storm of the night had passed, must grow in the grace of a princess before ever she comes under the spell the fairies cast upon her at her birth. Even the spell itself must be no more shibboleth of words, but, as I have endeavored to tell, a tangible thing, such as the oath John Desmond made in the hearing of Mrs. Slattery as they stood alone in the dining-room of that weather-slated house—the palace of the king, however great the poverty of his kingdom.

What is more, the palace must be named. And it is named. They called it Waterpark. For all I can suppose, 'tis Waterpark they call it still. Why, even the court physician is hygienically garbed, to satisfy the most exacting critic in that little circle gathered about my Christmas fire.

Well, then, now listen. This is a story of enchantment.

BOOK II

THE PRINCE SETS OUT UPON HIS JOURNEYS

"Once upon a time, there was a King's son, who felt too much dissatisfied to stay at home any longer. . . ."
Grimm's Fairy Tales.

I

THE HOUSE IN LADY LANE

IN one of the respectable thoroughfares of Waterford—indeed, in Lady Lane—in those days when more shipping made its way up the River Suir than ever does so now—and that is coming fifty years ago—there lived one Sandy Stuart, a wine-merchant. His place of business was the house in which he lived; for, respectable as Lady Lane was then, it had not advanced, as now, to that condition of fashion when a landlord, within his lease, forbids the conduct of the most honest dealing in trade upon the premises.

No. 4 was a secretive-looking building, in the secretive narrow street, which, like its occupant, kept its affairs to itself, yet seemed, with its high windows, to have that sly spirit as of one who is not above peeping into the affairs of others.

There, in that front-room, to the left of the flight of four stone steps approaching the hall door, and overlooking the cobbled street, Sandy Stuart did all his business. A high mahogany desk stood in lonely dignity at the end of the room. It seemed to suggest that the common affairs of business were never in its concern. It offered the rich, broad surface of its lid for no meaner purpose than the composition of a gentleman's accounts, and that of no less exalted a requisite of his household than his wine-cellar. Before it, in mute apology, stood a high office stool, barely justifying its existence in such

company by the open confession of the mahogany of its legs and frame.

In the center of the room was a table, and that was of mahogany too, but with a dignity that must have put to shame the high office desk—indeed, with all the dignity that Sheraton had given it. A Sheraton cabinet, with glass doors in many panels, stood against one of the walls. It looked severely upon all about it, but that severity diminished as you made out the diamond glitter of some several rows of wine-glasses, all Waterford cut, that winked at you from behind those symmetrical panes.

With the exception of three or four old mahogany arm-chairs—leather-seated, with leather that even in those days had polished and toned to that indescribable richness of age —this was the only furniture in the room. Yet, with a fire burning in the grate below the Adams mantelpiece, casting warm colors in the shining surface of the polished oak floor, with that faint odor of corks and sealing-wax that rose from the cellars down below, and those steel engravings of members of the Stuart family in tarnished gold frames on the faded green walls, it was a room possessing a silent fascination of comfort to any man who wanted to pass his nose across a glass of good wine or let it linger in that amorous delay upon his palate.

Here it was that the gentry from the whole county came to buy their wines, tasting their ports and sherries in the Waterford cut glasses which Sandy brought out from the Sheraton cabinet and polished with a cloth always kept in the desk for the purpose; then, as he put the cloth away, holding them lingeringly up to the light, they winked at you more flagrantly than ever they did behind those sober panes.

"Let 'em see the glass, man," said Sandy to his son, teach-

ing him the business—"let 'em see the glass first. It flatters a wine is nae sae guid as it might be."

If, indeed, his wines ever needed flattery, they received it in a full measure from those twinkling Waterford-cut glasses he took with such unapparent ease out of the Sheraton cabinet.

"I'm no thinkin' there's a man in a' Waterford would know a '37 port if 'twere given in a common tumbler," he would say, and there is little doubt of it he was right.

But Sandy Stuart had a higher reputation for his wines than such canny behavior as this might lead you to suppose. Indeed, there is a saying you may yet hear at times on the lips of an antiquated butler in some of the old county families.

"Oh, sure, 'twould pass the lips of Sandy," they say, when speaking of a favorite wine. And many there are who, if you asked them, would not even know the origin of the thing they said.

Indeed, it was often a matter of heated speculation over the dinner tables amongst the old bucks of those days as to where Sandy Stuart got his French brandies, his old brown sherries, and his vintage ports, and the inevitable suggestion that they were smugglers' goods made them lie only the sweeter on the appreciative tongue.

How or why this old gentleman—for he was no less, and could trace his descent, if by devious ways, to one of a more noble house, though of less exacting morals—how or why he came to Waterford there is no record to show. In the year of '49 he set up his business in Lady Lane, and swiftly became known in the town for his secretive habits and his excellent wines.

Though by no means a young man then, he brought with him a young wife. Dark and beautiful she was to look at. A foreigner, they said. But before the curiosity of the

neighborhood had overcome its prejudice, she died, leaving a son, then three years old, the striking image of his mother, with dark locks of hair that curled thickly upon his shoulders, a deep, rich olive skin, and those lustrous brown eyes that alternately flashed and slumbered, but most times looked out sadly on the soft gray Irish skies.

Some said she was a Spaniard Sandy had married abroad when buying his sherries and his Southern ports; others that she came from County Wexford, where the strain of Spanish blood still lingers in the veins from the days when the Duke of Medina Sidonia flung all his mighty ships of war in flight around the Hebrides, and found the rocky coast of Ireland on his way to Spain.

Only the priest of the neighboring church who had heard her in confession and attended at her bedside when she died could speak in certain knowledge of her. Something of a foreign tongue she had, he said, but with such perfect English did she speak, that there was no being sure of whence she came.

So, to the chagrin of many a curious soul in Waterford, she departed from this world before anyone had had time to make better her acquaintance. To her husband then, secretive even in his grief, they came, making amends and offering their sympathies, whereby Sandy Stuart became a recognized inhabitant of the town, from which moment his business grew apace. In three years' time from the day of his wife's death, the jaunting-cars of the gentry from as far as Dungarvan, and even west of that, were stopping at his door in Lady Lane.

Charles Stuart, the boy, Catholic as his mother had been before him, was sent first to school under the preparatory influence of the Misses Whelan, an establishment where children were more kept out of the way of mischief than

instructed in the knowledge of books. From there, at the age of nine, he passed on to a proper Catholic school, and at the time when this story first takes upon itself all the spirit and glamour of a fairy tale, there he was in his father's office, learning the trade, just as a Prince at his father's court may learn the trade of kingship.

But all this talk hangs heavy on the tale itself, and may well indeed be ended. A prince is a prince by what he does, and nought that's said of him or printed upon parchment will prove his lineage so well as a rousing spirit and a gift to love the adventurous in life. He may sit on a high office stool and be called a Prince until his legs shall touch the ground, but nothing will set the crown so surely on his head as when he sets his own feet to the floor and takes the risk of life with no more care for danger than a man who picks a flower by the wayside and sticks it in his buttonhole.

On a night in March, when the soft rain was dripping from the gutters' ends, when, in the blackness of the streets, the lights in the houses' windows were like the eyes of animals crouching in the dark, Charles Stuart took up the risk of his life and turned his eyes, all burning with adventure, towards those broad pathways where any man may walk and be a king.

II

AN ENCOUNTER

WHEN your heart is set to the tune of hazardous affairs, and the ring of steel against steel plays mightier music in your ears than all the best trained orchestras in the world, it is no easy matter to sit without fidgeting on an office stool and listen to the

sounds of a child practicing on a piano in the house opposite.

There came a day when Charles Stuart, making out accounts for his father's customers, seated at the high desk in that front office room and listening to one of the Misses Whelan's pupils as she thumped on the piano over the way, could bear restraint no longer.

Ever since he had been of an age to wander by himself, he had found his way down to the quay-side, clambering on to the ships, sitting in the forecastle with the men while they ate their food. To such an audience a sailor knows that a yarn is expected of him, when, even if he has no adventure of his own, he readily invents some, or recounts as his own experiences the tales he has heard in all his wanderings.

In the ears of a boy, fast coming to the longed-for freedom of the man, such stories are like draughts of wine in the blood, to which his imagination reels, intoxicated with all the delirious odors of romance.

Young Charles came home at nights to toss upon his bed in dreams of fights by sea and bloody battles on the land. By day he dreamed of them no less, and on the papers on his desk—that desk more proud to lend itself to such accounts as these—drew pictures, with a straggling pen, of schooners sailing the broad seas, and all those high adventures that a man may come by in his stirring passage across the world.

Finding one day these hieroglyphics of his son's mind scrawled out upon a piece of paper, Sandy Stuart brought them in an accusing hand, and asked their meaning in the tone of a father's deep displeasure.

"They're ships," said Charles.

"Aye, laddie; and what have ships to do wi' bottles of port and my best madeira?"

It was alongside such an account as this that the ungainly drawing had been made, and, pointing with his finger on the paper, the old man put his question in that dangerously solicitous tone of voice that boded ill for his son. Charles Stuart knew his father well enough to recognize the danger, and from long years of discipline had good cause to fear it.

"Isn't it ships like that bring you your wine from Spain, sir?" said he, with all the innocence he could charge into his big brown eyes.

"Aye, aye," replied the old man, watching him shrewdly; "but I'm thinkin' they look mair to my likin' dischairging their cargo by the quay-side than happing about in that brattle on my office paper."

Charles took the hint, and, because he had a lively fear and respect for his father, confined those pictures of his hungry mind to pieces of paper less likely to fall into the old man's hands.

But the need for secrecy only intensified the appetite of his desires. From visiting the seamen on their ships he came to following them to their haunts on land. There, though he drank little himself—indeed, only so much as seemed to give him the braggart air of fellowship—he would sit of an evening while they brewed and drank their bowls of brandy and of rum and talked their sea talk, till his head was filled with nautical terms.

Then came that day when, with all his heart adventuring on the high seas, he sat upon the stool in his father's office, listening to the monotonous sounds of the piano across the way, and hearing in the cellars below him the faint sounds of the old man bottling his wines.

Sitting there, biting the quill in his hand, he suddenly bit the pen in two, crying out to himself that his purgatory was no longer to be borne.

"I'll not stand it! I'll not stand it!" he cried aloud; and working himself to a frenzy that took no reckoning of all those years of discipline, he jumped off the office stool and made his way down into the cellars, wrought to a pitch of audacious temerity he scarcely recognized in himself.

It all cooled sadly as he came down the cellar steps, and by the time he reached the stone-paved floor was little of the spirited flame it had been. There was his father by the light of two guttering candles, sealing his bottles of port with the bubbling wax, and as the old man looked up at him from under his crafty eyebrows, the unhappy boy felt his determination melt in him like the sealing-wax itself.

"Weel?" said Sandy, regarding him expectantly, anticipating in the perturbed manner of his son some favor to be asked, and electing to discourage it no sooner was it uttered. "Weel," he repeated, "have ye no enough work to be doing in your office, ye maunna come spiering in the cellar to see would I be working mysel'?"

"You tell me you want me to be interested in the business," replied Charles, timidly enough, and conveying far less than he had meant to do at that moment when he had bit the quill pen in two, yet nevertheless leading the conversation towards that turn he wished it to take. "You tell me you want me to be interested—well, why shouldn't I come down into the cellars sometimes? It's not all office work."

Indeed, this was a sore point with him, that never was he allowed to go down into the cellars alone, and only with his father when the old man had voluntarily signified his permission. This uncalled-for and unexpected appearance of his down the cellar steps was against the regulations, and had taken Sandy completely by surprise. His mind was even so unready as to entertain the idea that his son's interest in

his work was exhibiting signs of improvement. He stood there in the dim flickering light of those two candles and looked the boy up and down.

Now, Charles, slow-witted enough in all conscience over his books and figures, was by no means slow to see an advantage in any conflict with his father, and, seizing his opportunity, he plunged still further along the way he had chosen for his complaint.

"You tell me nothing about the wines themselves," he went on—"where they come from, what they cost. I don't know good from bad. I don't even know what you've got in the cellars. If you expect me to be interested, why shouldn't I be told? I'm sixteen years old. I'm not a fool."

It was at this moment, as he talked, warming to the advantage he no doubt over-estimated in his mind, that his eye chanced to fall on a door in the cellar wall. Never, in all the times his father had brought him down there, had it been open before, and, assuming it to be some cupboard in the wall, his curiosity about it had never been roused. But now it stood ajar, and, the light of the candles falling slantwise through the crack of it, he could just see that no cupboard was there, but a depth of darkness that suggested at least another cellar beyond.

With a sudden motion of his finger, he pointed to it.

"What do you keep in there?" he asked. "I always thought it was a cupboard. It's another cellar, isn't it?" and he moved towards it to look within.

Before he had touched the door to pull it wide, the hand of his father had intercepted him and thrust it to. The bolt slipped in with a heavy, metallic clank that echoed down along the vaulted ceilings into the musty darkness.

"Dinna touch that door!" exclaimed Sandy in a feverish and excited tone. "Dinna touch that door if ye're no

wantin' a guid thrashin'. I'll hae nae clatter aboot my affairs and that's why I keep 'em to mysel'."

In the light of things that happened after, Charles Stuart realized with what agility the old man must have leapt across that intervening space between them as to be first there with his hand upon the door. At the time, all that he observed to any purpose was the note of fear, mingled with an uncontrollable anger, in his father's voice. And nothing could have been better at that moment to his liking. Striking a note of his own and of injured dignity, he demanded to know when he would be considered man enough to learn the secrets of his father's business.

"I sit up there with those damned books," he cried, rapping in an oath as, when conscious of the upper hand, a swordsman swaggers over his opponent, "and all I learn of the business is how many bottles are bought and sold and who it is that drinks 'em."

To all of which, partly because this exhibition of spirit astonished him, though more, perhaps, on account of the fright he had just suffered, which Charles might have known more of had he had the mind, the old man said nothing. He just stood there with his hand still trembling on the handle of that inner cellar door, blinking his eyes and coming slowly by the breath he had lost over his sudden exertions.

And all this quietness of temper in his father surprised Charles Stuart, no less than it deceived him. He thought for sure he was master of the situation then, and, all the spirit with which he had first set forth upon the cellar stairs returning to him, he cried out:

"I'll not stand it, and there's my mind made up. There are stouter things for a man to be doing than driving a quill and haggling the gentry to pay their bills."

"And what are they?" inquired Sandy quietly.

"I want to be a soldier, sir," said Charles eagerly, assured now that the matter was coming his way. "I want to swing a sword and do a man's work. I want to see further across the world than the breadth of Lady Lane, and I want to ride a better beast than a damned office stool."

Here was his imagination, reeling and intoxicated with romance, flavoring his speech and astonishing even his father, though he gave no moment to consider it.

"In wha's sairvice will ye be swinging a sword, laddie?" Sandy asked, and his voice was as smooth as velvet on a lady's arm. "In wha's sairvice?" he repeated; for the Crimean Wars were over then, and peace had long been signed in Paris.

"It doesn't matter a rap to me," Charles replied. "There's the whole world to do it in. 'Taint every countryman is sitting on an office stool and dipping his pen in the ink."

There was one more thing old Sandy said, in that same tone of sweet indulgence, as though he were spoiling a petted child, and which, in all the first elation of success, completely deceived his son.

"Since when did ye become sic a man, laddie? We maur ha' been owre lang unkenned to ane anither, for I've nae noticed it."

There was, however, something hidden in this last remark that whipped the blood up into the surface of young Charles' olive skin. He burnt a deep ruddy brown, and his eyes flashed out even in that meager candle-light.

"Let you set any fellow dipping a quill in the pot," he declared hotly, "and you'll have no gumption of the sort of man he is till he flings all down and stands upon his feet!"

Then here it was that Sandy dropped all gentleness of speech, and spat his words like any cat that after the first

onslaught has suddenly unsheathed her claws and flung the pose of helplessness away.

"I've a' suffeescient gumption in me head to ken ye for a purblin' gowk," he cried, "wi' nae maer wit for feegures than a bull for milkin'. Gang awa' back to yeer work, man, an' gie me nae mair o' this bletherin' prattle aboot swords an' swankin'. If ye've nae enough spunk to hold a feather in yeer hands, I'm no thinkin' ye'll have muckle grip to catch a sword."

He said all this standing there on the cellar floor and shaking in the tempest of his anger. And that was not all, for when he had made an end of it with speech he strode forward, hissing with the breath between his teeth, and seized his son with a grip of iron by the elbow, dragging him to the foot of the cellar steps and pointing with a quivering finger to the door above them.

"Gang up to yeer stool," he shouted, "and be gettin' at yeer duties. 'Tis obedience to yeer faither 'll mak a canty man o' ye in quicker time than a' yeer swingin' swords and boastfu' clatter!"

In common defense of Charles Stuart, from whom no circumstance in the narrative is intended to rob him of those qualities of a prince which the tale demands of him, it must be admitted without question it was no cowardly sense of fear that sent him back up those cellar steps without one further word of protest.

In all the fairy stories in the world, the prince is he marked out for thrilling adventures, but there is no chronicler of these magic tales who ignores the despotism of the king his father. In that sense of authority which a son obeys, where he would flout another man to his face, all fathers are kings and must be heeded. Indeed, there is no man a king who cannot so command and be obeyed.

It was not, then, from a sense of fear within him that young Charles climbed slowly and silently up those cellar steps, and made his way back to that office stool where the broken pieces of his quill pen still lay scattered on the floor. It was not from a want of spirit, when once again he was seated at his desk, that he buried his head in his hands and burst into a flood of sobbing where there were no tears to wet his cheeks or accuse him of his folly.

A bitter disappointment was all that rankled in him, chafing against his soul that there should be within the house a spirit as high as his own and one that by reason of all those years of habit and discipline must be obeyed.

It seemed to him that there were fetters about his feet that chained him to his office stool; that never in the days to come would he feel the blood leaping and pursuing through his veins to all those glorious tunes of hazardous adventures.

III

THE HOLE IN THE WALL

ALONG the quay-side in the town of Waterford, facing the anchorages where the ships unload, there stands a bending row of houses, bent with the curve of the river as it winds from the sea into the town. They stand there now. With scarcely a change in the appearance of any single one of them, they stood there fifty years ago.

Oil-stores and rope-stores there were; long, dark warehouses, pungent with the scent of the sea, all plying their precarious trade with the ships that came and went, and came and went again, and then, perhaps, came back no more.

But they have a saying there, amongst those men who

barter and deal on the salty edge of the sea. "Ye can always trust a ship," they say, "but divvle the man that sails her."

Allowing that to be true, it is easy to understand how the lodging and drinking houses, where the seafaring men spend all their days ashore, have come to wear a suspicious look, as though, trusting no one, they asked in return no confidence from any man.

The whole quayside was a honeycomb of places like this —mean little houses that drooped their eyes and would not look you squarely in the face. Humble they were, and sleek and sly, so that when passing them you scarcely were conscious of their presence. But if you looked back over your shoulder when you had got by, there was always some beckoning face at a grimy window, some blind that stirred or a curtain caught to a peephole by unseen fingers.

The most honest of these abodes took their place with the rope-stores and the warehouses along the front of the quay, yet never losing that look of humility as they wedged themselves unobtrusively into the close-packed crowd. But there were other than these, and plying a more sinister trade— low-built little houses that hid their faces in the shadow of dark alleys, where only the slit of a doorway could be seen in the dirty whitewashed walls.

From out of these doorways men came and went after nightfall, choosing their moment, if they were sober, to step out into the narrow passage, more often than not lurching forth like refuse cast into the gutter.

Amongst all those houses at that time, the one kept by O'Shaughnessy was of most evil repute. Up a dark passage where never a lamp was lighted, it lay like a hunted man in hiding behind the tallest houses on the quay. Two rooms there were on the ground-floor, one screening the

other with an apparent show of honest poverty. On the floor above were other apartments, where men slept in their heavy slumber in such filth and vice as make no story better for the telling.

O'Shaughnessy himself was an evil thing to look at, never appearing in the town in the light of day, never quitting the seclusion of his hiding-place till the night had become a cloak he wore about his bending shoulders.

With his straw-colored tails of hair, fast fading to a dingy gray and cut long in a line around his drooping shoulders; with the pale, narrow eyes he had and the loose and sensuous mouth; with the unhealthy pallor of his cheeks, on which never a hair had grown to make a man of him, he looked like one of the vicious *petroleuses,* those ancient hags of Paris, who crept the streets like vermin through all the horror of the siege.

Scarce a word he said to those seafaring men, the scum the sea washes out of the corners of the world. They came into his house when the nights were dark; they went out before the morn had broken, when his soft and clammy hand, held out to them to take their money as they departed, was about as much transaction as ever he had with them, beyond attending to their wants.

The Hole in the Wall, they called that place, and many there were who lived in honest trading on the broad quay-side who had never so much as heard of it. But in far harbors, over the length and breadth of the world, wherever ships congregated in still waters and men came close together, telling their endless stories of the sea, that name was known and spoken of with a whispered voice, an expressive raising of the eyebrows, and a significant nodding of the head.

The Hole in the Wall! What a place indeed for a prince to set out from on his journeys! But the world has places

of no sweeter smelling perfume than a giant's kitchen, with all its dreadsome odors of human blood.

Yet there is clean air with scent of lavender in it that this story comes upon, when all these odors of vice and darkness shall have been cleansed by the winds that purge and scatter over the broad bosom of the adventurous seas.

Till then the present must content us, for it was to no other place than this that Charles Stuart went that evening after the encounter with his father.

Nodding to O'Shaughnessy, which salutation the old man acknowledged by a drowsy closing of his eyes, he passed through the outer room to that beyond, and took his place in a far corner where he was wont to sit.

Two men at a table were playing a game of forty-five, with greasy cards all thumbed and smeared by reason of their long use in filthy hands. Bowls of rum punch were steaming beside them. Money lay in little heaps on the table. They sat with their hands close together, in long silences, with the ray of the oil lamp picking out the bright circles of the gold earrings in their ears.

In an opposite corner to where the boy was sitting, oblivious of everything about them in their drunken slumber, a negro lay huddled in a shapeless mass, with his arm about the shawled head of a white woman out of the streets. His black hand was spread across her face like a stain, as though hiding her features from curious eyes.

It was not to these he looked, but towards two men, bent together in low and earnest conversation, spitting excitedly at whiles upon the floor between their talking, drinking their brandy neat, and ever demanding more from that silent and watchful figure of O'Shaughnessy, who seemed never to intrude, yet always to be present when drink was wanted or a pipe to be filled.

The atmosphere in the room was tinged with that faint and musty-smelling blue, the blue of smoke from the pipes of men who have come and gone; of smoke that has no such escapes as they, but must drift in lines and eddies about the imprisoned room; of smoke that is dead and stale and hangs upon the curtains like a thing with clinging claws.

But around these two, as they sat in the close commerce of talk, the bright blue smoke of the burning pipes hung like a screening curtain, which, to the lively imagination of Charles Stuart, seemed to add a fascination of secrecy to which his curiosity rose beyond the bounds of all control. It was from the lips of such men as these those tales were told, whether in narrative or in bartered converse, pitched from one to the other—those tales that came to be to him like bread sopped in steaming wine and put between his hungry lips.

He moved himself nearer to where they sat, and heard one say in that wheedling voice a man employs when the devil is at his elbow and speaking temptation through his lips: "Christ A'mighty, man! it's only quitting one master to serve another. One ship's better than another, and some voyages worse than the last. Strike me! ain't it a free country, and can't a man serve where he likes?"

"Oh, but I've signed on," said the other; and he spat upon the floor, as though his conscience lay there and he would cover it if he could.

"Signed! Strewth! and what's a bit of paper? You put your mark to the damn thing afore you knew there were better things goin'."

"I signed my name," corrected the other, which, besides letting it be known he could write, seemed to stand in his mind for deeper compromise.

"Well, you signed your name, which is a damned sight

more than I can do, and what difference does that make? A drop or two more ink ain't going to send a man to damnation—not that I know of. Well, anyhow, there it is. You can take it or leave it. I ain't tryin' to persuade you. We wants a boy for the deck cabin amidships, and a man forrard, and we sail tomorrow morning—daylight—with the tide. Fair winds, we shall be in Vera Cruz before you can turn and turn about. You can clap more sail on her than any ship ever I had berth in, and she'll ride into it like a knife. Rip the guts out of a sea she will, and leave it rollin' behind her as if it was no more than a ripple."

"Shan't I have to sign on for a return voyage?" inquired the other. "What happens, then, when we get to Cruz?"

"What happens?" replied the first—and he looked at his companion through a diffusing volume of smoke, as though he were looking at a child in wonder at its simplicity—"What happens?" he repeated. "Why, we goes ashore—that's what happens—and we joins the forces of General Miramon, and there's loot, loot, loot, every town we come to, till your eyes 'ud be sick looking at it. I tell yer I'm no fighting man. Let folks settle their quarrels, I say. But when it comes to swinging a cutlass and doing your man, with God knows what sort of a haul at the other end of it, it's better than fishing, I say, or sittin' about on a swabbed-down deck, waiting for a creepin' wind to carry the cargo of another man's goods, and you answering 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and touchin' your bloomin' forehead, and hauling on them blasted halyards till yer die."

This much Charles Stuart knew: he talked of the fighting in Mexico. General Miramon was leader of the rebel armies, seeking to depose Benito Juarez from the Presidency. Foreigners in Mexico were being treated as the scum of the earth; the whole country was seething in and reeking of

civil war. By reason of the injustice done to European settlers in the country there had been talk all over England, reaching Ireland too, of a fleet of French and English ships being sent out there, demanding reparation.

This was fighting sure enough, work for a soldier, adventure for a man, and here at last was one, whatever his motives, ready to swing a sword and take the risk of life.

Young Stuart leaned across the table and touched the speaker's arm.

"What might be the name of your ship?" he inquired, while his heart was jumping about inside his jacket like a bird in a cage.

"And what the hell is that to you?" was the answer he received.

This was talk direct enough and straight in all conscience to the point. But it brought no such prostration of fear to his mind as the gentle irony of his father. For here was a man with no authority of kingship, and with no more rights than any journeyman on the king's highway. Wherefore, with that reply to his ears, instead of beating faster, the heart of Charles Stuart sobered down to the steady pulse. If need be, he could talk of hell himself, though with less intimate acquaintance.

In a prince, however, who sets forth boldly into the world, seeking his fortune, besides a childish simpleness of heart there is a touch of bravado, the swagger which comes with a sword at the side and a dagger tucked out of sight into his breeches. All this he can bring forth when the occasion demands it, and will rap out an oath that has never passed his lips before—moreover, with as much familiarity as though it were forever on his tongue. It is the sense which comes to him that if things are worth doing they may as well be done with a will and a whistle. Indeed, such a youth would

meet death with a brighter smile in his eyes than ever he would go to attend an audience with his father.

It was no less a spirit than this that Charles Stuart had practiced upon that old autocrat of the wine-cellar when first he had believed the advantage was on his side.

"I sit up there with those damned books," says he, and flings the oath from between his lips, if for no more than to convince himself of the man he means to be.

If, then, he could wear that swagger with his father, it was a simple enough matter to put it on here with one who had no more right of speech than he. So it was Nelson went into battle with all his medals dangling on his breast. So is the spirit that makes any man a prince, and has a deeper-rooted meaning at the back of it than all your divine right of kings.

"No more of hell to me," said Charles amicably, and smiling that careless smile which surely he must have owed to some other when the house of Stuart was in livelier fortune—"no more of hell to me," said he, "than you or any man. I asked a simple question—that's all. If your damned ship hasn't got a name, I don't want to christen her."

The two sailors playing their game of forty-five looked round from their table and laughed. Even the man's companion sent a guffaw from his lips; but the sailor himself spat his juice on the floor and lifted himself slowly to his feet.

"What young cockanapes are you?" he inquired with a drawl, and mixing his epithets, by which doubtless he meant to convey the confused impression of gentleman and fool which Charles Stuart had given to one and all of them the moment he opened his lips. "What are you doing, I'd like to know, in this place is meant for honest sailors takin' their bit ashore? I've seen you here before, haven't I, sittin' up

there in yer quiet corner with yer ears cocked, listenin' to what's goin' and sippin' yer drop of rum, like a baby havin' its first milk out of a spoon. It 'ud be a pity to spoil yer appetite, wouldn't it, and you lappin' it all up so nicely, ears and mouth and eyes and all, seein' what's to be seen and hearin' what's to be heard. It 'ud be a pity to spoil yer pretty appetite, wouldn't it, but that's what I'm goin' to do, and with both hands round yer bloody little neck."

It was nothing in the nature of fear that Charles Stuart felt then when he saw the sailor advancing towards him, slowly turning up the grimy cuffs of his sleeves, nothing so full of trembling misgivings as when his father had seized him by the arm at the foot of the cellar steps. Now he knew his heart was beating, but that was all. It was beating steadily, strongly perhaps, but not in that same rushing flutter of apprehension.

There was a sensation in his mind that the man was within his rights. Often he had wondered before that none of them had ever complained of his incongruous appearance in such a place. They were all men trading on the wrong side of the law, if not in those drinking-houses on the quay-side, at least in that owned by O'Shaughnessy. Any stranger caught there invariably aroused suspicion, and he had frequently noticed, when glances had fallen on him, that one or another had left their seats and pulled O'Shaughnessy into a quiet corner, whispering questions into his ear, but returning to their chairs in apparent satisfaction.

But now it had come. He was up against the general suspicion of them all, and the indignation of one in particular who had a little score of his own to settle. No man cares for the sound of laughter a mere boy has turned against him. If it was with no more than common sense, Charles Stuart knew that the best he could hope for was a matter of fists.

Yet this was fighting, this was swinging a sword, and a man's work. He might be sore after it, but never so sore at heart as when he had buried his head in his arms and sobbed like a child that morning.

Quickly he looked about him for the best place he could stand, and in that moment his eyes had become a cat's. All the soft and Southern languor had gone out of them. They were dancing, they were even laughing, but there was in them that which makes a man who sees that glitter know that he must look to his wits as well as the weight of his arm, if he would hold his own.

The door of a cupboard was let into a corner of the room under a slope of the ceiling where the stairs passed to the apartments up above. He knew if he could get by that there would be no chance for the sailor to rush in and get his arms about him. If he feared anything, it was the weight of his opponent's body. Once he was borne to the ground, he knew there would be little help for him then. It would be a drubbing, like a boy over his father's knee, and perhaps worse. The haft of a knife was sticking out of the sailor's belt, and when he saw the glitter in the boy's eyes, his hand began a-feeling for it.

It was a matter of gaining a moment to come at the place he wanted; wherefore, with a wry laugh on his lips, he held up his hand.

"One second!" he exclaimed, and laughed saying it, enough to disarm any man's suspicions. "Before we begin this, has your damned ship got a name?"

At the shout of laughter that rose upon this, the sailor looked about him at the others, as one who would ask what was to be done with a fool like this, and in that moment Charles Stuart slipped to his place.

But it was not to serve the purpose he intended. Before

their laughter had died away, there came through the outer room a rushing of feet and a tumbling confusion of sounds. In all the pandemonium of voices that clattered about his ears, Charles Stuart heard dimly that murder had been done on those long dark quays, and there was a man flying from justice like a rat to his hole, with the police hot-foot upon his heels, and right into the midst of those who one and all feared justice more than death.

It came to his mind no sooner than the vision of a man stained with blood and that witless look of a hunted animal in his eyes.

"They're coming up the alley!" he shouted with what breath he had to speak, and then one of the card-players leaped to his feet. Charles saw him pick up the stool on which he had been sitting; he saw it raised like a flash around his head; he saw in the distance of the room beyond, the greasy locks of O'Shaughnessy and his red and watery eyes; then there followed the crash and splintering of a thousand pieces of glass as the stool fell on the oil lamp and the room was plunged into the bowels of darkness.

IV

THE CUPBOARD

THE last words Charles Stuart heard spoken in that darkness were in the whispered voice of the seaman who but five minutes before was preparing with upturned sleeves to ring his neck. It was in a bated breath he spoke, and to the man whose better principles he had been endeavoring to seduce.

"Here's hell!" he muttered. "Come on—the window's

the way. If we miss each other, she's the *Lodestar,* brig, lyin' at anchor half ways to the point. You get your tackle and come aboard tonight."

He heard no more. Either they had gone out by the window or the door. In the confusion of shuffling feet it was impossible to know what was happening. The instinct of self-protection was too quickened in him then to think of others; for besides the ugly suspicion that would fall on him were he found in such a company, he was thinking of the wrath of old Sandy when he heard the news. It was more expedient, he felt, to get away and show a clean pair of heels now than ever it had seemed when, but a few moments before, he stood facing the sailor in the immediate prospect of a wrung neck and the devil to pay into the bargain.

For now, as well, a sweat of fear was broken out upon his face. The issues of a pothouse brawl are reasonably within the computation of anyone, but a raid of the law on such a den of vice as that, and, what is more, with talk of murder in the air, was, to say the least of it, an unsavory business.

For a moment he stood there in the darkness, wishing to God he had never set foot in the place; then, hearing the sounds of approaching footsteps coming towards him from the room beyond, he moved, and as he moved felt the cupboard give behind him.

With an instant's flash of thought across his mind, he turned and tried it. The door was open. He pulled it wide and noiselessly, and, like a cat, he crept within the space below the stairs and pulled the door to behind him.

There was no moment to feel about or know the sort of place it was. Striking his head against the slanting roof,

he had pressed his body back into the furthermost corner he could find, and not a moment too soon. He had scarcely settled himself into a attitude in which he could keep himself in stillness, before, in the darkness, he heard the creeping footsteps approach, and, in the darkness, knew that the door had been opened again.

"Is there annywan there?" he heard in the muffled whisper of a voice—"is there annywan there?"

It was the voice of O'Shaughnessy, yet he could not be sure. His heart was beating wildly in his throat. He could hear the pulse of it in his breath, like the wheezy ticking of an old clock, and in such physical disaffections as these it is impossible to think clearly or rely upon the nicely balanced judgment of the mind. It was not so often he had heard O'Shaughnessy speak. There was the darkness, too, in which the senses of taste and hearing stand so sadly in the need of sight. Moreover, added to this there was the knowledge that the police were creeping through the house, as much afraid of the light as the sailor had been who had smashed the lamp with the first implement that came to hand.

But that which above all these counseled him to silence was the note in the voice that had spoken. Whether from fear and a lively apprehension of the knife that might be buried in his neck, or whatever it might be, Charles Stuart knew that the speaker had no intention of entering that cupboard.

If he kept still and held his breath; if, too, that beating of his heart, which thundered in his own ears, could not be heard, he was safe. In the blackness he could hear the man listening. Then, if he were listening, and still uncertain, no definite sound had reached his ears. He shut his lips and let the quick breath filter in thin streams through his nostrils.

"If there's annywan there," the voice whispered after a moment's pause—"an' 'tis the way I t'ink I can hear wan, and he breathin' "—it paused again, but Charles Stuart was not to be caught by such vague promises as this—"he'd better come out," the voice continued, "for I'm afther goin' to put the lock on the door." There was an instant's pause again, and then, as though clinching the awful threat, the voice added in a still hoarser whisper: "I am."

A smile flickered on Charles Stuart's lips as he heard all the sounds of the turning of the key, and in the deliberate hands of one who wishes it to be well known what he is doing. But the footsteps did not move away, and he sat there smiling in the musty darkness to think how well he had come by the rights of the matter in his mind. It had been a pretty trap, and swiftly set, and he felt a warm satisfaction in his own cunning that it had failed to catch him.

Five minutes it seemed and more passed in that cumbrous silence before he heard the wily shifting of those footsteps as they moved away. Yet still he dared not turn or make a sound, for now swift feet with shifty tread were moving on the staircase just above his head.

He lay cramped where he was, in that darkness that smelt of damp earth and dripping walls, together with that odor he knew so well, the scent of wood and wine that have lain long years in company. But now at least he could let free the fluttering breaths that were stifling in his lungs, and as the footsteps up the stairs died away into the distance of the rooms above, he leant forward from the place where he sat huddled against the walls, and pushed the cupboard door to open it.

But no pushing would open it. The cupboard door was locked indeed.

V

THE ESCAPE

CHARLES STUART leant back once more against the wall. O'Shaughnessy it had been, and no other. With all his cunning to avoid the trap, he knew now no trap had been laid for him. The door was locked; O'Shaughnessy had the key. By now it was more than likely the old man was in the hands of the police, and the key was in his possession. Even if he gave it up and Charles himself was found there in hiding, the matter looked black enough. But there had been some note in O'Shaughnessy's voice, a *leit motif,* which only now returned to the boy's memory in the light of events as they had shaped themselves.

As he crouched there, leaning against the sodden wall, he recalled the querulous tone, blended of fear and cunning, in which the old man had put his questions. What was he afraid of? Truly it might well have been a healthy apprehension of a knife buried in his neck, cause enough for any man to think twice before he laid himself open to the danger of it. But there was no reason to suppose that one of his kidney would be more solicitous for the welfare of others in such moments of stress and expediency. Why, then, had he come to lock the cupboard door? Not certainly to give a warning to whoever might be there in hiding. The best that might be said of O'Shaughnessy would not accord him with such motives of generous altruism. He had locked that door in his own interests; but it was impossible to say what those interests were.

Little indeed did it matter to Charles Stuart what they were, since there he was a prisoner, and with but little chance

of escape before that hour when his father would grow uneasy concerning his whereabouts. It came to this, that either he must sit there, concocting some far-fetched invention—a tissue of lies—to explain his long absence from home, if at the time of his release he ever got away without the knowledge of the police; or he must make good his escape then and without so much as a moment's delay.

The door had been locked, yet his first thoughts came to that, the only means of exit he knew. For to such a door the lock might well be weak, the hinges hanging to a loosened screw. He crawled across the slimy floor and softly leant his weight against the center panel; he was employing all the strength his body knew. It neither creaked nor yielded to his efforts. Nothing gave. He was a prisoner as surely as any condemned man in his cell, for the frame of the lock, as he felt for it in darkness, was as massive as the lock on his father's safe. This was no cupboard in which to cast a household's rubbish out of sight. Then what was it for? He felt about all over the sweating stones and found nothing. The cupboard was empty, except for a piece of coarse matting two empty barrels stood on and kept in place upon the floor.

For a while, again, he leant back against the wall to consider his position. It was ugly enough: to be found by the police on the one hand and to be discovered by his father on the other. Neither was to his liking. He drew a deep breath of despair, and with it there came again to his consciousness that odor of wine and wood and all the musty dampness of the place.

The next instant he was down upon his knees again, hammering with his clenched fists upon the stones, listening, like one tuning a delicate string, to the sound of every blow. Over the piece of coarse matting the note rang hollow, and

seemed to echo far away below him, like the boom of the sea breaking far inland in some subterranean cave. His heart came hot in a lump into his throat, and a moment later he was tearing the matting away from the wooden trap-door it concealed beneath.

Counter-sunk into the door was an iron ring. His fingers soon pried it up. The whole thing lifted heavily, and the cold damp air from the cellar below rushed up like the chill winds a vault imprisons, and beat against his face.

No light was there. He had no light himself, but with groping hands he found the cellar steps and, setting his feet upon them, crept down into the pit of darkness that yawned beneath him. Seven steps there were in all, and no great depth.

He could just stand upright when he reached the floor, and this was something to be thankful for after the cramped confinement of that cupboard up above. It was better to lie in hiding there, where at least he could move and stretch his limbs, coming to which conclusion, he mounted the cellar steps again and closed the trap-door above his head.

But the glorious quality of youth is the eternal measure of its hopes. Far from content with his escape from the imprisonment of his cupboard, Charles Stuart began groping his way around the walls, saying over and over again to himself in a half-breathed whisper, "If I can get out of that, p'raps I can get out of this," and ever pressing on with an uplifted belief in Fortune, where another more bitterly experienced in life, for a time at least, would have been satisfied with the improvement of his conditions as they were.

Wherever he moved, he stumbled upon jars and kegs of brandy, or, in the darkness, tumbled his body against great

hogsheads of wine. With even the little knowledge he had of such matters, it was plain to be seen these were all smuggled goods, bringing little wonder to his mind that O'Shaughnessy's first thought had been for his cupboard door. Carrying out his nefarious trade in such proportions as this, it was no difficult matter to reckon the wealth there must be in the old man's coffers, or to understand how he came by it. A sailor here, a sailor there, each bringing his little portion and getting a goodly price for it, no doubt enjoying into the bargain a sense of security and the hospitality of that den of vice where, during his days ashore, he could indulge his vilest fancies.

Charles Stuart, with his blood now tingling to all the vibration of adventure, chuckled comically to himself when he thought of the secret that was in his keeping. Failing the knife the old man would doubtless bury in his back if he could, here was a weapon of information to his belt that he had only to finger with a threatening hand and anything he might desire would be his for the asking.

But it was not considerations of this nature that occupied his mind. He still crept blindly round the clammy walls, and when between two cumbersome hogsheads of wine he found the latch and bolt of a door, the chuckle turned to a soft sound of laughter, like a child taking the plaything its expectant hands have been stretched out to hold.

"Come on!" said he to himself under his breath, and, forcing the bolt, he swung the door open and peered within.

It was not another cellar as he had expected, but a narrow passage leading on into still colder darkness, down which, with all the spirit of discovery eager in his blood, he made his way, without even so much as closing the door behind him.

This is adventure, to engage with life with a stout heart, even into the unknown, so that in its hour the very moment of death itself assumes no more terrifying proportions than the first outset of a journey to an undiscovered world.

So it becomes a hero to behave, cautious, perhaps, in his approach, as is required of a man who carries a precious thing, his life, so lightly in his hands, but shrinking never in heart, never counting the thing too precious that he carries, prepared always to offer it for an ideal, but never for a price.

And if this is so of heroes, it is no less so of princes, who, in a fairy tale at least, must prove their right of kings by no mean shuffling of divine prerogatives, but by that fearless quality of soul which sets a man all head and shoulders high above his fellows and marks him for a hero in the broadest and whitest light of day.

In some such spirit as this, with that earthy chill of the air buffeting in his face and the stench of the underground sickening in his nostrils, Charles Stuart made his way along the narrow passage in the inky darkness.

Keeping his head low as he walked, and never knowing that moment when the mouth of a well might not lie open in the ground at his feet, he stopped at whiles as he went, standing with the water about his boots, listening in the darkness.

He could hear the rats scampering before him in the shallow water, he could hear the gentle dripping of the moisture as it fell in drops from the ceiling up above, and but for these noises the deepest stillness was everywhere, behind and before, so deep in that oppressive darkness that when he drew a breath, the sound of it was like a heavy sigh all magnified and distorted out of recognition.

Nothing was to be gained of this; wherefore he would set on once more, with hands feeling along the slimy walls till the water was running down his fingers to his wrists and soaking the sleeves of his coat upon his back.

It seemed such time that half an hour must have passed, and still there was no ending to this tunnel beneath the ground. In quick flashes of a pent-up imagination he would think of the distance of darkness between him and the only place he had knowledge of where there was light. Then the sweat and the moisture would mingle on his forehead and drop down his cheeks as with a child in tears, yet never at any moment did he utterly give up hope or, when the thought came to him of turning back, allow it but the freedom of an instant's passage in his mind.

Onwards and still onwards he pressed his way until the water was squelching in his boots and every garment upon his body was no less saturated than if he had been walking for miles in a storm of rain.

It was at last, when the entertainment of hope had become only a bitter effort in his heart, that something in all that darkness caught hold of his numbed sense of sight. The tunnel had turned a corner. He knew that by the bending curve as the walls passed under his groping hands, and there, like a slit the thickness of a hair, he saw a thin white line that cut athwart the blindness of his eyes and gave him sight again.

At first he could not be certain that what he saw was in his actual vision or only an hallucination in his mind. He shut his eyes and it vanished. He opened them, fearing what he should find, and it was still there.

With a heart now beating high and hope singing triumphant and exaltingly, he quickened his steps without fear of pitfalls, and every moment that pale line grew longer and

broader and brighter in the surrounding depth of gloom.

At last it came when by the light of it he could see the walls on either side of him, the slime that glittered with its wetness, the drops of water picking up the points of light. It was a door admitting the illumination, but a door not at the end of that endless passage, for before ever he reached it he could see how the tunnel widened into the breadth of a spacious room.

This was a cellar like that in which O'Shaughnessy kept all his smuggled goods. Like O'Shaughnessy's, too, it was filled with kegs of brandy, and one long row of great barrels of wine. It was not difficult to recognize that these two places were in one agreement, at one end receiving the smuggled wines and at the other introducing them in all the guise of simple virtue and innocence into the honest light of day.

But Charles Stuart scarcely paused to look about him. With feet now running almost, in the certainty of every step he took, he crossed the cellar floor and peered through the partly opened door.

It was a wider and more capacious room he looked into, and this was a cellar, too. By the starving light of three flickering candles an old man was standing by a table, sealing his stamp, with infinite care, upon bottle after bottle of wine, which one by one he took up from the floor.

With each bottle as he sealed it, such was the care he used, the breath he held escaped from him with a suppressed grunt; then, raising them to the light, he examined each one carefully before he set it on one side.

Charles Stuart stood there, and it seemed as if life in the breath he breathed was just waiting on the service of his lips. He could not speak. He could not move. The man he saw before him was his father!

VI

THE DISCOVERY

THEY are scarcely to be calculated, those sensations of a boy when first he discovers that the father from whom he has learnt his understanding of the meaning of that word "honesty" is no more than a common felon and liable to the utmost penalty of the law. Hot shame is upon him then, and the heat of anger too, for judgment in his mind has all that swiftness of youth, too quick for mercy, too sudden for restraint.

Charles Stuart, gazing through the half-open door at the old man in the quivering light of those three candles—the old man who only that morning had lifted his voice in irony against the clean ambitions of his son, would have been thankful in that moment if he had been buried alive in those underground passages, rather than that he should have made such discovery as this.

It fell upon his mind to turn back, to retrace his steps through the bowels of the earth once more and court discovery, if need be, in the place from which he had fled so eagerly but half an hour before. To hide the bitter knowledge he had acquired deep in the secret shame of his own heart, this was the instinct that went so far as to turn him silently on his heel and set his face towards the impenetrable darkness once again.

Two steps he had taken to the tunnel's entrance, when, blinded with the contrast from the light of even those three candles in all that blackness, he fell over a keg of brandy, stumbling with a muttered curse to the floor.

"Wha's that?" screamed Sandy's voice from the other

room, and in but a flash of time was standing there at the cellar door, gazing down at Charles Stuart as he slowly picked himself up to his feet.

"Been speiring in ma cellars, hae ye?" he muttered in a hoarse whisper, too swept with his own anger to find his proper voice. "Thocht ye'd lairn the bees'ness, eh, laddie? an' ye sae muckle a mon wi' a' yeer sneisty clavers aboot swingin' a sword!"

In a lively passion wherein words were poor things compared with looks, and moreover hard to find, the old man stood there in the sparing candle-light, trembling from head to foot in his anger and shooting such glances from his crafty little eyes as were intended to scorch and wither the culprit he thought he had found.

With a dour expression on his face, Charles Stuart returned in silence every glance his father gave. No longer had he the look of a boy of sixteen then, but of a man full grown in the bitter experiences of life. It was no mere childish obstinacy in his eyes, for in that moment of disenchantment, and with the weight of responsibility so suddenly flung upon his shoulders, he had outstripped his boyhood, left it indeed in that musty cupboard at the end of the passage, with all its beating pulses and its hunger for romance.

Knowing nothing of this, it was only to be expected that Sandy Stuart would regard the attitude of his son as the perversity of stubbornness which comes upon a boy when he sees a thrashing ahead of him and knows that by no quickness of wit or subtlety of excuse can he avoid it. But mistaken as it was, it served as no easement to his anger. He knew that temper well, and, as one all-powerful in authority, had got but little satisfaction from it.

When, in the heat of his righteous indignation, a father thrashes his son, he likes to have some measure of gratifica-

tion for his exertions. None appreciate better than he that importunate appeal for mercy, when just the last three blows that follow it upon the same quivering place are such cooling refreshment to his heated temper.

But in such a mood as Charles Stuart was—and his father thought he knew it well—there would be no such satisfaction as this. He might wield the cane until his arm was tired, and at the end of it there the boy would stand, dry-eyed and silent, moreover with not one shadow of change upon the determined expression of his face.

For this very reason Sandy for two years had given up all use of the cane. It tired his arm and achieved no purpose that he could see. Indeed, as a contest of wills, it would have seemed, young Charles had always had the best of it. With a secret pride in his son's endurance, old Sandy came reluctantly to the conclusion that it was an easier matter to lie prone across a table and take a thrashing than to work laboriously on your feet in giving one. For the last two years, he had accordingly cudgeled his brain for craftier punishments than this, keeping the boy locked in his room for a time, until he found that the rain-water pipe was accessible to and from the ground; then finally setting him uncongenial tasks that had to be accomplished by a certain hour.

This last infliction had been successful enough, but by no means appealed to his sense of the fitness of things now. In the glowing heat of his anger, he felt he could wield a cane to advantage then, until the young cub was crying for mercy, and, working himself to still further ecstasies of his rage, he demanded to know when the young "black-a-vised gowk" had found his way down into the cellars and how long he had been there in hiding.

"Gie me an answer to that, mon!" he cried out, as young Charles stood there in silence, eyeing his father just as a

judge, in the contempt of pity, eyes the offending prisoner at the bar. Yet still he did not speak, but remained motionless and unflinching as his father came threatening across the cellar floor, bringing his face, livid with its passion, close against his own.

"What! Ye'll no speak?" he spluttered in his rage; and now for the first time, Charles Stuart detected the faint vibrations of fear in the old man's voice, a fear that behind this silence of his son's lay some knowledge of the secret he fondly believed was yet in his own keeping.

A moment of apprehension there was certainly. He put it away from him as swiftly as it came. Half an hour at the utmost the boy could only have been down there, and in that time was no opportunity, even had he discovered the passage, to realize all that it meant.

"If ye'll no speak this minuit and tell me where ye were bidin' the whiles I've been sealin' ma bockles, bi Guid, mon, I'll thrash ye wi'in an inch o' yeer life!"

"I've not been hiding," replied Charles slowly, then suddenly he turned, and with a dramatic finger he pointed to the black yawning mouth of the passage, when his heart began a swift thumping in his breast at the sure knowledge of all that must now inevitably be said.

"I came through there," said he thickly; "and that's where I've learned your damned business, as well as you could ever teach me."

There was plenty of indication in this that he knew something, and more than was to the peace and comfort of Sandy's mind. But there was no reason to suppose that he knew all. In those days, when there was much talk of smuggling in Waterford, he might well, with a boyish fancy for adventure, have rushed to conclusions at the sight of that passage—conclusions which had no foundation upon

definite knowledge and could easily be discounted by a crafty tongue.

In one moment, then, the old man let his anger go, having no further use for it, and with a genial smile that spread about his face, he took young Charles' arm with a grip as gentle as only that morning it had been of iron.

"Let's gang along upstairs and talk a wee bit," he murmured persuasively. "I've thoct ye were unco young to be takin' responsibilities on yeer shoulders, and maybe I was wrang, mind ye. Ye're gay and smart for a laddie o' yeer age, an' I'm no sayin' but ye'll de fine when ye come to ken the ins and oots of the bees'ness."

He was all then for leading his son away and as far from the proof of his guilt as possible. It only proved his guilt the more, yet there was one moment when the boy, in a fear of his own shame, was inclining to compromise, inclining to give his ears to those specious arguments and excuses he knew would be deft and cunning on his father's lips as soon as he had had time to collect his wits to invent them.

One step or two in the direction of the cellar steps he took under the guiding pressure of his father's hand. Of a sudden then he stood still. He was going because he was a coward, because he was afraid to accept the ugly facts as they were, because he had rather not know the thing he so surely knew.

And what would be the result of it, when he had listened to all the crafty explanations his father would feed him with, as a child in sickness is fed out of a spoon? The sickness of his disgust would still be in his blood. The malady of disillusion would be no further from him with all the administration of this prophylactic of cunning lies and artful representations.

Far better that he should have the truth out then and

there and be done with it. He made up his mind swiftly to it, and as swiftly he slipped his arm out of the cajoling grip of his father's hand as he turned on his heel and faced about to the passage entrance once again.

"I'll not go upstairs," said he, "and I don't want to listen to any of your explanations. What we've got to say can be said down here as well as anywhere else. As far as my age goes, I'm just as young and just as old as I was this morning when you jeered at the things I said about going to be a soldier. I'm sixteen and a few more hours—that's all. It's those few hours that have made the difference, and if you're as good a man at business as they say you are, you'll just let me go off straight away and do a man's work, without saying any more about it."

There is no little difficulty to the mind in letting itself go accused and unheard, even when it is deeply conscious of its own guilt. Somehow or other, willy-nilly, a hope exists that there is some kink of ignorance in the armor of the accuser, some vulnerable spot by which the whole vitality of his accusation can be mortally wounded and brought to the ground. But when the accuser is your own son, and there is all the clamor of your own authority demanding instant reparation, you are half-ways towards acting foolishly before you can so much as open your mouth.

In the maintenance of his dignity as a father, Sandy Stuart forgot all his cunning as a man. To be thwarted and by his son was more than his arrogance could bear. All his persuasive gentleness returned to anger, and he stood there livid in his passion and shaking like a little child in a rage.

"I'll no abide sic treatment frae me ain son!" he shouted, and would have stamped his foot had it helped matters one way or another. "What hae ye got in yeer thankless heart, ye miserable shaveling, that ye can stand there, makin' me

justifeed and deave yeer ears to what I'd be tellin' ye? What is it ye ken aboot the bees'ness makes ye talk like a minister reading a sairmon i' the kirk?"

"What do I know?" repeated Charles. He pointed with his finger once more to the blackened entrance to that subterranean passage, and now, for shame of it, he could not look his father in the face. "I know," said he, "that that passage leads to O'Shaughnessy's den—the place they call the Hole in the Wall down by the quay-side. I know the purpose it's used for and the trade that goes on between here and there. If you want me to put a name to it, I will—I'll spit it out on the floor where honest men can tread on it. Is that enough for you to grasp why I want to go out a-soldiering? If it isn't, I'm quite prepared to listen to what you've got to say."

Apparently it was enough. Sandy's head was bent like a branch some gale of wind has broken and brought low. He said not a word as Charles Stuart waited. He did not speak as the boy moved away to the cellar stairs and alone. Up the steps he climbed to the door that opened into the house, and the last he saw of his father for six years and more was the bowed figure of the old man, standing there in the half-broken darkness, pitifully fingering at a button on his coat-sleeve.

VII

THE SETTING-OUT

THE rain was still racing in little torrents and cascades down the gutters, the clouds still rolling heavily through the sooty darkness of the skies, when half an hour later Charles Stuart, having seen no

more of his father, and with a bundle tucked under his arm, opened the door of the house in Lady Lane and stepped out into the rainy deluge of the streets.

The sound of the hall-door closing heavily behind him produced in his heart no instant's echo of regret. The malady of home-sickness does not always develop its symptoms at once. They are often concealed behind the thrilling moments of departure. There flashed across his mind the wonder whether his father had heard the slamming of that door, and if he had, how it must seem like the buffet of a hand across his face. But he was too young as yet to feel the softer emotions of pity for the old man's duplicity. He could not realize the temptations that had been put before his father, nor did he know anything of that night, six years before, when, sealing bottles in his cellar, just as he had been doing when young Charles found him, the figure of O'Shaughnessy had appeared out of the darkness, carrying with him a stone jar of the most priceless brandy that had ever passed Sandy Stuart's lips. He could not have appreciated, had he been told of this incident—which is surely matter for some other story than this—how when once the silky liquid, like the grip of a warm hand in a velvet glove, had touched the old man's palate, he would have given his soul to possess it, and had indeed given no less.

But youth and the cards, they neither of them have heart for forgiveness; and Charles Stuart, at sixteen years of age, left his father's house that night in March with no more regret than a boy turning his back upon the school days which in after years he comes to know were the days of sheerest happiness in his life.

Down to the quay-side he went, and with no hesitation in the direction he took. His mind was set already on what he was going to do.

To a tumble-down cottage, leaning desperately against the side of one of the old warehouses on the quay, indeed reliant upon that warehouse wall for its support, he came within five minutes through the drenching rain. There lived here one Tim Cronin, a boatman having a leaky old tub with which he earned a meager living, ferrying people backwards and forwards across the river or taking drunken sailors home to their ships.

On the door he knocked with his fist and waited, hearing no sound within until he had repeated his summons three separate times.

Then it was a thick voice declared that it was too late in a night the like of that to be taking any damned sailor to his ship.

"It's not a sailor," said Charles, and raised his voice above the clatter of the rain and the tossing wind that swept along the quay. To make it more certain that the door might be opened to him, he called out his name, adding that his business was as good as it was important, and waited again.

In a few moments the door was cautiously opened and the face of Tim Cronin, besotted with sleep and maybe with more intoxicating liquors than that, looked out through the narrow aperture.

"What the hell d'ye want, coming wakin' a pore man up and he in the middle of his sleep? Is it a little pleasure trip in the boat yeer wantin'? Shure, glory be to God, isn't it a night to drown cats in—it is indeed!"

Against all eventualities, Charles set his foot against the door.

"Do you know a ship called the *Lodestar?*" he inquired. "Brig—sails tomorrow morning with the tide?"

"I do indeed. She's lying up half-ways to the p'int."

"What sort of a ship is she?"

"Oh, well enough. I'd take me chance in her."

"Where's she bound for?"

"Vera Cruz, they say—which sounds like the name of a lady, and I shouldn't be surprised if it was."

"It's in Mexico."

"Oh, indeed—well, and aren't there women all over the world, and most ships I know 'll take ye to 'em."

"I want to go on board tonight."

"Ye would, Master Charles. There's divvle a thing I know of ye wouldn't want to be doin'. How the hell ye came out of the guts of that old man, and he bent double with his corks and bottles, I dunno. Shure, marriage is a quare thing."

"I'm not going to stand out here in the rain telling you how I came to be the son of my father," said Charles abruptly. "Shove on your clothes, man, and come and get your old tub out. I want to be on board tonight."

"An' what'll ye give me and I drenching meself to the skin, the way I'd get a cold out in the North Pole itself and I hopping out of a nice warm bed?"

"I'll give you five shillings," said Charles, for the journey in the daytime was worth no more than one.

"Oh, I couldn't do it for that at all," Cronin replied at once, knowing what eagerness is in youth and calculating when a thing must be done, it must, when youth will empty its pockets to pay for it.

"How much, then?" inquired Charles.

"Shure, I couldn't do it under a pound, the way I'd have to be buying meself a bottle of whisky and a suit of clothes maybe out of it, not countin' what I'd have to be payin' for the doctor."

"There's Mulcahy has a boat," said Charles, and he made the slightest movement of turning on his heel.

"Well, I'll make it ten," said Cronin, and he moaned as though the bargain would bring him to the grave. "And God help me," he added, "for 'tis a foolhardy thing to be doin' on a night the like of this."

They almost drifted down the river, for the tide was already beginning to run, and the ships were turning on their anchor chains, thrusting their noses in the water to meet it like dogs scenting the chase. One by one their dark shapes, picked out with their anchor lights, rose out of the black breast of the river and fell away behind them as they made their passage down towards the sea.

"There she is," muttered Cronin at last, as the dim, fiddled outline of the brig grew like a gray shadow standing out of the darkness.

Her port and starboard lights were burning, and as they drifted near the shadow of her bows they heard voices and the sound of feet stamping on the deck. It was evident she was going to weigh anchor within the hour. They were not a moment too soon.

Charles stood up in the little boat, while Cronin clung to the bowsprit stays, holding her back from that surging eagerness all floating things betray in their hungry efforts to reach the sea.

"Aboard there!" Charles shouted, and shouted it again when a man's head looked cautiously over the bows and, as if imagining he could not be seen in that darkness, made no reply.

With the quick sight of youth, Charles recognized him, and a laugh came curling to his lips when he thought of the surprise that was in store for him.

"I can see you!" he shouted, and it struck him comically that they might be playing a game of hide-and-seek. "They call your brig the *Lodestar,* do they? Why the devil couldn't

you tell me that at first! It wouldn't have taken so much breath out of you as wringing my neck."

At this the man stood up and looked over the solid taffrail.

"What the blazes do you want?" he inquired.

"What I was going to make inquiries about this evening, if you hadn't been in such a damned hurry to shut my mouth. Have you got your boy for the cabin amidships?"

"No," said the man.

"Well, will you take me?"

"God bless my soul and garters!" the sailor exclaimed, and leaned over the taffrail, peering down into the boat to make sure his eyes were not deceiving him. "Well you're a rum un!" he muttered when he had made certain who it was. "I made swear I'd seen the last of you this side of next Christmas. You've got a staggerin' cheek, you have!" And he said it with the lingering note upon the expletive, as though he liked it. "Are you coming aboard?"

"For the job and not for anything else," said Charles.

"Aye, aye—for the job all right. You've got a nerve, you have, to come out on a night like this to pick up a berth. Come on! Catch hold of that stay. Swing your legs up. That's it! Catch a hold the end of that staysail halyard. Pull away! pull away! It ain't a blasted bit o' cotton-wool."

One more effort and he was on deck, when he leaned over the side of the brig that was to be his home for many a long day to come, and flung a half-sovereign down into the boat below.

"There you are!" he shouted, and there was the ring already of a man in his voice. "And if you hear of my father asking where I'm gone, tell him the brig *Lodestar* bound for Vera Cruz, and that the berth was offered me, in his nicest manner, by a gentleman in O'Shaughnessy's back parlor."

This is the true spirit of bravado, without which youth would be a sorry thing and no boy would ever set out on all the perils of adventure flinging his hat into the air.

VIII

A TAILPIECE

WHEN the next morning broke the rain clouds had been swept away like cobwebs from the blue ceiling of the sky. The world was cleansed and burnished, and a place for a beating heart to live in.

As Charles Stuart came on deck after none too happy a night of it, the brig, with all sails clapped on and to a smart breeze, was passing the blunt nose of Ardmore Head. She sang her song as she cut through the crested waters, the song of straining ropes and bending spars, of creaking bow all tuned to the note of bounding energy, and as the salt wind blew through the curls of his black hair, and the moving land on the starboard bow swung up and down to the tune and rhythm of his thoughts, he drew a deep breath into his lungs and thanked God for freedom and adventure.

And so our prince sets out into the world, as the prince in any story has ever gone forth from his father's kingdom.

Without such happenings as these, no fairy tale indeed would be complete; for it is neither crowns nor scepters, nor is it wishing-rings alone that make the glitter of magic in a prosaic world. There is always the old man by the roadside who has the secrets of enchantment in his giving, and who other than he is Tim Cronin, the ferryman, biding his days by the river's way, waiting for those travelers who make their journey down the road of life? It is the prince

alone, with all his gentleness of speech, with the gift of bread sometimes from his wallet, sometimes with the gift of water from the brook, who wins from him the favor of his aid and counsel. And who but a prince, when once he had set foot upon that ship, would have thrown his half-sovereign to that rapacious old villain in the boat below?

In the sailor, too, no less, Charles Stuart would have fought with, need you have more than the brightening eyes of romance to see the giant in his den who bars the prince's way to all successful wishes of adventure.

Here are the eyes with which to look at life, then; and what better, since life must in your own measure be lived? So you may turn the gray monotony of the dullest days into the glittering glamour of enchantment, and make a better world your mind may live in, all notwithstanding that it carries the chains of your body about its feet.

BOOK III

THE KING'S DILEMMA

". . . And the King sent out into the furthest corners of his kingdom in the search of wise men who might shew him the way out of his dilemma."

Old Fairy Tale.

I

FATHER CASEY

IT was an occasion of some misgiving, of no little trepidation, yet mingled in his mind with a certain flutter of pleasurable excitement, when Father Casey received and accepted an invitation to spend an evening at Waterpark.

The invitation entailed more than one prospect. He would be an impotent spectator to the gradual process of John Desmond's complete intoxication, a process not without its splendid moments, when, warm and elated in spirit, that gentleman rose to flashing summits of wit and swept gloriously on into the ethereal heights of oratory. Notwithstanding that he shook his head sadly over them afterwards, they were splendid at the time to Father Casey, who had read his Burke and his Gratton, and knew what the joy of language was when once an Irishman unloosed the tether of his tongue.

For here was a priest who, with all the gentle mildness of his exterior and the studious expression of his countenance, had a heart under his cloth, and could feel it beating like a horse's hoofs on a hard road when there was ought to spur it on. And there is no doubt that when intoxication gave John Desmond the grandiloquent freedom of his tongue, he did say such things as a priest—I care not of what church he be, so long as he has the innerds of a man—might well be envious of and wish had been his own.

In addition to the infection of this excitement, there was

the tricksy business of steering a course of sobriety for himself without offending the exuberant hospitality of his host. Let it be said at once that he came always from these meetings a sober man, beyond which it is unnecessary to explain how narrowly he achieved it. With the hand of an importunate man ever ready to fill a glass that is not swilling to the brim, this is no mean accomplishment, and speaks well for the man in Father Casey that upon this count at least he never broke friendship with John Desmond.

But these two aspects of the entertainment which it was to visit Waterpark paled into insignificance beside a greater interest than the mere flow of eloquence or a delicate exercise of tact.

John Desmond was a good Catholic, as most Irishmen are, and I doubt not it will be granted, like many of his class, better at heart than in observance. Truly, he went to Mass every Sunday, as was demanded of him; fasted, if not with drink, at least with meat, on Friday; but went to confession only so many times in the year as the Church gave license for, when half the things he might have told the priest were clean gone out of his head.

It was on these occasions when he invited Father Casey to spend the evening with him, that he unburdened the heaviest weight upon his soul, when, having no little sympathy with, as well as an experience of, human nature, the priest accepted such conditions of confession without regard for the unsanctified circumstances under which they were made. Only, indeed, when there was matter for absolution did he quietly suggest that holy water and the sacred silence of the church were fitter accompaniment for his confidence than tumblers of steaming punch and an armchair cocked up in a balance on its back legs.

For, after all, confession, if it be good for the soul, comes

no truer out of the heart or smoother off the tongue when you make a ritualized service of it, if, indeed, as true or as smooth. Such statement as this, I know, stamps plainer than any brand the heretic I am. Yet heretics, if they do but stand with warm hearts in the crowd, can sometimes see the man in one in whom the true believers behold only the priest of God.

So I profess to see the man in Father Casey, and am content if I see no more.

It was the man in him no doubt who looked forward in pleasurable excitement to those visits to Waterpark, wondering what it could be there was to be told him, waiting, as one after another the tumblers were filled, when the moment of confidence would be reached in which he could hear that confession for which he had been expressly sent to learn. It was only at times he raised his hand against it, and then the priest in him it was that interfered.

On the evening of the invitation, the boy saddled the old mare that had borne Father Casey on her back for fifteen years, and had a history stretching away into a further past than that. Indeed, there were old men in the village of Portlaw who went back to their youth to tell stories of Father Casey's mare, and these, though they had not a fraction of truth in them, merely served to show how old the beast must be, since without the semblance of possibility there would not have been one to listen to them.

It can readily be supposed, then, he had good time for speculation upon the events of the evening that lay before him as he jogged along those four miles out of Portlaw to Waterpark. And on the occasion where this story takes up again the narrative of the princess—six years at least after that stormy night, when the tiles were tumbling from the roof and the spell of her life was first cast upon her—Father

Casey came by the path across the fields and through the shattered gates and crumbling gaps in the loose stone walls, because it was the longest way and he had of the matter in his mind much tasty food for speculation.

"Will ye come and say two words to me?" was the burden of the note he had received that morning by the boy, now grown in the service of John Desmond to a raw-boned man.

There was no more than this, and though his invitations were usually of a brief and more emphatic nature, they were delivered by word of mouth. This, scrawled hastily across the first piece of paper he could find, seemed to convey to the mind of Father Casey a prospect of deeper interest than any summons that had gone before.

So it was he came by the longest way, debating in his mind how best he could persuade John Desmond to ease the burden of his soul in orthodox confession, if, as seemed highly probable, the matter should need the absolution of the Church.

It was coming on to dark of an April evening as the old mare stumbled through a ragged gap in one of the ill-kept hedges protecting the fields of Waterpark.

John Desmond farmed his land, like many an Irish gentleman, as much by the grace and mercy of God as by any endeavor of his own to reap the virtues of the soil. Once, by the chances of luck, he had bred and sold a horse for four hundred and fifty guineas, and was ever living in hope that Chance would come his way like that again.

When he was sober he had no little craft in his dealings with men over the sale and purchase of his animals, and could drive a good bargain with a beast he knew was worth its salt. But many a time had he been known, in a moment of rage and a mood of disinterestedness, to give a horse away

for a mere song because he disliked the looks of it, when another man would have come out fifty guineas the better from the bargain.

He dealt, indeed, as they said about him in Portlaw, like a gentleman, which meant and means, amongst farmers all over the world, like a fool. Wherefore, with such precarious living as this, he staggered, deep in debt, to keep his head above the surface of the ugly water all about him, and made both ends meet in Waterpark in much the same way as most Irishmen do—namely, by cutting a piece off one end and tying it on the other.

Father Casey looked at the broken hedge as he came through, the old mare breaking it down still a little more than the last beast that had preceded her, and shook his head at these sad evidences of neglect.

"Sch! sch! sch!" he said aloud, and added, with a wisdom you will find in Ireland: "If it wasn't the way he neglected his boundaries, wouldn't I have to go round by the road and not be leaving his hedges down worse than they are already?"

No one was there to take his horse. He called "Hi!" and "Boy!" but there was no boy there, the youth having come to that age when a glass of porter won out of a game of pitch and toss behind Cassidy's public-house was better drink than any liquor obtained out of a possible tip.

Father Casey tied the mare to the foot-scraper at the bottom of that broken flight of steps, and, knowing the habit of the bell, the knob of which protruded enticingly from the pillar of the door, he knocked with his fist upon the panels.

A moment later Mrs. Slattery was standing before him, just as he knew Mrs. Slattery would stand before visitors at that open doorway as long as her legs would carry her

ever-increasing proportions, as long as John Desmond kept himself out of the union or the foundations of Waterpark remained as they were—and all for a matter of twelve pounds a year.

II

A DIGRESSION CONCERNING AN IRISH GENTLEMAN

IT was into the dining-room Father Casey was shown, the same room in which that memorable night had been passed six years before, when John Desmond had given his oath upon the destiny of Patricia, coming at that moment into life through the very gates of death.

To a casual observer, nothing in its appearance had changed since then. The same drab, mustard-colored paper was on the walls, that Mrs. Desmond had chosen ten years before—indeed, on that occasion when the horse had been sold for four hundred and fifty guineas, and money was as loose as water in that house for three months at least. The same curtains hung from the heavy curtain poles, the same Brussels carpet was on the floor, the same mahogany furniture stood against the wainscoting. Nothing apparently had changed, and yet, beneath all its changelessness, there was lurking the odorous symptoms of decay. Since Mrs. Desmond's death, even the curtains had hung there, with no more of a shaking than they received at Mrs. Slattery's hands when she pulled them in the morning, or at John Desmond's when he pulled them at night.

Things die, like people, and though by no computation can you reckon the life of a wall-paper, yet there comes a time when the odors of death are about it. You may call it damp, but it is death, and until John Desmond had lit his

pipe of an evening this was the prevailing odor throughout the house.

He was smoking that evening when Father Casey came into the room, but the bottle of whisky, the glasses, the lemons, and the hot water had not yet been brought; wherefore he greeted his guest in some sort of silent welcome—the kicking out of a chair from under the table, the stretching out of a friendly hand, and the nod of his head to the tobacco-jar.

"Fill yeer pipe," said he abruptly, "and, for God's sake, man, clean yeer spectacles; I dunno whether ye're looking at me or not, for ye're one of them fellas what says more with yeer eyes than ever ye speak with yeer tongue, and there's not a little ye'll have to say this evening before I've finished with ye."

In obedience to this request Father Casey sat down, unhooked his spectacles from behind his ears, then, drawing a large red pocket-handkerchief from the tails of his coat, he set to a-polishing them in silence, content, moreover, to maintain it until such times as his host was ready to begin.

At that fading hour of the evening, when the work which he did in the day was over, and when, with some conscious effort of self-restraint, he was putting off the inevitable moment before he rang the bell for Mrs. Slattery to bring in the whisky, John Desmond was a man of few words. He sat there alone in his armchair, scarcely moving, his eyes fixed before him, as if he were counting out the abstemious minutes of his self-enforced temperance—counting them religiously until flesh and blood could bear it no longer. Then, with a swift movement, as though some thought had suddenly vitalized him, he would tilt his chair on to its back legs and ring the bell with a far-reaching arm. From that instant

he lifted to livelier spirits. From that instant the merest acquaintance would have recognized him as himself.

Once in the years of her service, Mrs. Slattery had made so bold as to urge him to temporary abstinence. It had been after the death of Mrs. Desmond, when the habit of drinking at night had settled more heavily upon him, and more than once Doctor O'Connor had had to be sent for to handle him and be handled by him in his delirium.

"There isn't a man but himself could stand it," the little doctor had told Mrs. Slattery in confidence, as he came away on one occasion after a mighty night of it; "and one of these times won't he get into his mad fits, and neither God nor four horses will pull him out of it."

She had taken this information tremblingly into her large heart, and, deeply pondering over it for the next two days as she went about the house, had come one evening, in summons to that bell, with no tray in her hands, with neither whisky, nor glasses, nor lemon, nor any of the paraphernalia it was her custom to bring without asking.

There she stood at the doorway, and there he sat in the chair, looking up at her in amazement.

"Yirra, what's on ye, woman!" he had muttered in his astonishment. "What are ye standing there for, with yeer hands settin' on yeer hips?"

"I've been with ye now twelve years, John Desmond," said she, "and while the pore creature was alive, didn't I help yeer wife, and she givin' a troublesome birth to ten children?"

"Ye did indeed."

"Well, if 'twere the way I was yeer pore wife now——"

"Which ye are not," says John.

"And I was after begging ye," she continued, paying no

heed to his interruption, "to give up the drink for a little while, wouldn't ye listen to me?"

"I would indeed," he replied seriously, for there is no doubt he knew in his own mind how near to the wind he was sailing. "I would indeed," he repeated, "for she was a good soul, and I'm thinkin' 'twas heaven was made for the likes of her."

In that moment he had looked up at Mrs. Slattery, half of a mind one way and half of a mind another, when, whether it was from seeing her far-from-ethereal proportions and comparing them with the slender figure of his wife, or what it was, there is no saying, but the moment of indecision was soon gone.

"If ye were the slender creature she was, standing there," said he, "and 'twas her voice in yeer throat, and it saying, 'Give up the drink, John'—just the way she'd speak with a flicker of her eyelashes—yirra, I'd break every damned bottle I had in the house."

"Well!" said Mrs. Slattery, and, doubtless too soon, there was the glint of conquest in her eyes.

"Well," said he, and there was the twinkle of humor in his, "as it is, ye standing there, the largest woman ever I seen in my life, I'll raise yeer wages, but I'm damned if I'll give up me little drop."

She had her retort for that, and could spit it out with the disappointment that was in her heart.

"I don't want ye to raise me wages!" she cried. "Yirra, wouldn't I be satisfied if ye paid 'em! But 'tis more than I can see what pleasure ye get out of the beastly stuff, and ye struggling and screamin' two nights gone by, the way ye'd be seeing things not there, and they crawlin' over the bed-clothes. What pleasure is there in that, I'd like to know?"

He looked back at her straightly, and at the sight of the ponderous, good-natured thing she was, throwing herself heavily about in her emotion, the twinkle of humor in his eye never left him.

"What pleasure?" he repeated, and chuckled in his throat. "Shure, when ye go up to bed, 'tis to lay yourself down and drop into a sleep like the dead, and with no more entertainment to it than yeer prayers. But wasn't I sittin' on me bed the other night, and didn't the door open, the way fifty weasels 'ud be comin' into the room, and they all in faultless evenin' dress? Would ye get as much entertainment out of a glass of water as that? Ye would not."

She looked at him, for some moments trying to keep as sober a face as the matter indeed demanded; but whether it was that compelling twinkle in his eye, or the irresistible humor of the thing he had said, certain it was that she suddenly burst out into a heaving fit of laughter, and stood there, hanging on to the handle of the door, until he assumed authority and demanded his whisky at once.

When Doctor O'Connor sent in his bill for the little matter of those midnight hours of attendance, there was one item that caught John Desmond's eye. It was no custom of his to regard a bill one way or another, and seldom his habit to pay it, but this had arrested his attention.

"For a new stethoscope," he read, "ten shillings and sixpence." And the next time he met the little doctor in the Main Street of Portlaw, he had asked him what the hell he meant by it.

"Shure, ye got hold of it that night," said O'Connor, "and nothing would suit ye but ye must play the 'Boys of Wexford' on it, and it's never been the same instrument since."

III

A BARGAIN WITH THE LORD GOD

UNTIL the moment when John Desmond tilted himself up on the leg of one chair and leaned across with a long arm in the habit of men in their indolence, for the bell, the two sat, almost in silence, their lips sucking on their pipes, their eyes, for the most part, set before them.

Father Casey inquired after the health of the children, of Sophie, Margaret, Josephine, and Patricia, the two boys as well, more or less as though they were cattle on the farm, all fed in separate stalls.

"How's Sophie?" said he, and as briefly John Desmond replied, "She's all right," and so on, one after another till they were all accounted for, and then silence. In this fashion these evenings at Waterpark usually began, until that moment when John Desmond rang the bell for Mrs. Slattery, and from that moment he became a man of very different temper.

"Well, here we are," said he, when Mrs. Slattery opened the door and appeared with the well-filled tray. It was the welcome he always gave her, whether there were visitors there or not, and "God help us, we are," said she, which was the perpetual formula of her reply.

When the punch was brewed, and that, though it was a silent process, was in a much livelier silence than the moments preceding it, John Desmond filled the glasses with an old silver punch ladle having a handle of horn. This was about the only relic of past grandeur in that house which had not suffered from the ravages of time. Indeed, this and

a few pieces of furniture were all that would have raised more than a song under the auctioneer's hammer. He had kept it, and with no little sentiment of affection, because in his youth, in that very room, he had seen his father ladling out the steaming punch with it, and, when the big bowl was empty, tipping the last drops out of the ladle between his lips, head thrown back with a deep-drawn breath of enjoyment at the end of it.

With this same ladle he helped himself every night. With it he poured the punch into Father Casey's glass, that late evening in April, preparatory to opening his soul in the confession of what was upon his mind.

It was after the first draught had been taken, and he had smacked his lips in honest approval of the brew, that he leaned across the table and looked into Father Casey's eyes.

"Could I make a bargain with the Almighty God?" said he.

It was no doubt something of a startling nature Father Casey expected that evening, to ponder over which he had chosen the long way to Waterpark through the fields. But he was not prepared to act as intermediary between John Desmond and his Creator in a common deal, and even had he anticipated it, this direct method of putting the matter took him in the half-breath of surprise. He leaned back in his chair and looked at the eager expression on the face of the man before him.

"Could I? Could I?" John Desmond repeated, and not once but three separate times—"could I make a bargain with the Almighty God?"

"Well, when ye say a bargain," the priest began cautiously, as though his mind were out of breath and he were bidding for time to recover it—"when ye say a bargain, 'tis the way ye mean ye're goin' to get the best of it."

John Desmond drank deeply out of his tumbler of punch, hoping in his silence this aspect of the matter would be overlooked.

Father Casey was not for overlooking it. He continued, and in just the same judicial tone of voice:

"And I dunno," said he, "would the Lord God approve of it."

Judging his Maker in the same light as he would himself, John Desmond was sure He would not. But amongst the men with whom he made his bargains, getting from them the best possible prices and perhaps a little more, when it was to his thinking it was a noble beast he had to sell, amongst them there was no such thing as the Infinite Mercy. If they thought they had been done, they did him in return, and at the first possible opportunity; and he them, when he could. But that, in the mind of John Desmond, was just where all human nature fell short of the Divine.

The Divine prerogative he considered it was, to suffer the brunt of all transactions at the hand of man, and, out of that same Infinite Mercy, to bear no spleen. But he had long admitted in his mind that the matter needed careful manipulation, and who better than a priest of God could he employ to negotiate the delicate proceedings?

It is indeed, though scarcely one there is to know it, the chiefest function of these clerics of the Church to protect the interests of God against the crafty dealings of mankind.

None better was equipped for such a rôle than Father Casey.

With all his sense of humor and his gentle tongue, his honest dealing and his power of tact, he could preserve the peace so often threatened between God and man, when

the latter finds himself brought face to face with the inviolable laws.

It was when Father Casey spoke so gently of the disapproval of God that John Desmond filled his glass and drank again before he introduced his conception of the Infinite Mercy, or pointed out how it could be applied in such a case as his own.

"I'm not sayin', mind ye," said he, "that it wouldn't be a mortal sin for a man to be takin' the advantage of a bargain, and God forgive me if 'tis meself would ever do such a thing. But aren't I a pore human creature, with all me faults and foibles; and if 'twere a matter of sellin' a horse, wouldn't the Almighty God know, an' better than I would meself, every pinny I'd paid for the rearin' of it and what profit it 'ud be the fair thing for me to take? He would indeed."

At this point, seeing that Father Casey's glass was short within an inch of the brim, he took out the punch ladle and filled it up to overflowing.

"If ye sip that," said he, "the way ye'd be bending yeer head down to it like a horse and it goin' to water, ye won't lose a drop of it."

Father Casey lowered his head and sipped, and then looked up.

"And what's the omniscience of God to do with yeer bargain?" he asked.

John Desmond laid a fist on the table before him, when, had Father Casey known him in his dealings with horses, he would have realized that this was the moment of barter when he was going to prove irrevocably to his man how surely he was in need of that which John Desmond had to sell him; moreover, that if he did not take it then, the chance was gone from him for ever.

"It has this to do," said he—"that with that whatever-ye-call-it of God, there's no such thing as a pore human creature like meself doing a deal. Yirra, I wouldn't do such a thing. But *if* I did"—and he cocked his head on the extremity of one side, to convince Father Casey how extremely unlikely it was—"shure, wouldn't the Infinite Mercy of the Almighty God make allowances for me the way I'd be only a man, and not always sober at that?"

Father Casey filled another pipe and lit it before he spoke. It was a delicate matter, the more delicate seeing that he did not know as yet what was coming, and he needed every moment he could steal in which to prepare his answers.

When the wreaths and rings of smoke were at last rising from his pipe, and such time had passed as any man must reasonably allow him for the tobacco to have well lit, he looked up once more through his spectacles at his host.

"John Desmond," said he, "when I want a new mare, and 'tis gettin' on that way, will ye buy her for me?"

"I will," said John, "and, faith, I'll let ye have her at what I paid for her if ye'll see to this matter for me now."

Father Casey chuckled down the stem of his pipe, for these were the moments of entertainment he anticipated when he accepted those invitations to Waterpark.

"Well, what is it?" said he, for now that he had been trapped into a bargain himself, to say the least of it, it was in the spirit of the entire proceedings, with all their show of superficial honesty, to hear what his companion had to say. "Tell me what it is," said he, "and if 'tis the way I oughtn't to be hearing it in the confessional, I'll listen to ye."

IV

A FILLY FOR A MARE

BEFORE any bargain can properly be entered upon, there is always a little ceremonial to be observed in the matter of refreshment. John Desmond could not have begun to discuss terms for so much as the purchase of a clutch of eggs without the observance of this custom. Accordingly, the first thing he did upon Father Casey's invitation to him to speak his mind was to lean over the punch-bowl for the ladle and fill up their glasses to the brim. When this was done, he took a large draught himself, after which his eyes narrowed down to the careful measurement of his words.

"Ye were not in the house," he began, "the night me poor wife took her ways out of this world, or ye'd have seen the nasty state I was in, and I settin' here all that night with one bottle as dry as a bone and another with the whisky tryin' hard could it touch the lower edge of the label. Indeed, thank God ye were not, and I near sending for ye. 'Twas no fit sight for a priest to see, though I had moments, mind ye—I had moments when I was as sober as an owl."

"I'm glad I was in me bed," said Father Casey, "though I blame meself I was not with her, and she goin' to her rest without the blessing of the Church."

" 'Twas that damn fool of a doctor," John Desmond continued, taking but scant notice of the priest's regrets. "Didn't he come down here to me in this room, and he sayin', ' 'Tis the mother or the child, John Desmond, and I've come to know which is it to be.' "

"Glory be to God!" exclaimed Father Casey, for this, indeed, was the first time he had heard the true story of that night, John Desmond having said nothing of it on account of the decision he had given, and Doctor O'Connor having kept a closed mouth for his reputation's sake. While as far as Mrs. Slattery was concerned, the affairs of that household were locked away for ever in the large depths of her faithful heart.

"Glory be to God!" repeated Father Casey. "Was that the way with ye? And what did ye say to him at all?"

For these are the most terrible demands the Church of Rome has ever made upon its faithful ones. 'Tis hard enough in all conscience to have to choose, but harder by far to have no choice at all—indeed, to be compelled to sacrifice that one who, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, must be the best beloved. There is not a priest, there is not a doctor, there is not a man in all the Roman Catholic Church—for all three may be concerned in it—who would not sooner go to the utmost ends of the earth than be involved in such a predicament.

"I told him," replied John Desmond promptly—"I told him to go upstairs and use his bottles and his knives for me own damnation; for if 'twas a girrl it was—and she got into the habit of bringing girrls into the world—hadn't I promised, if she overed it, the little creature should go into a convent? In the name of God, then, wasn't it better herself should come out of it, with the gentle way she had and she keeping me off the drink, than I with another girrl on me hands, who would be goin' into a convent before she could so much as mix a bowl of punch for me?"

It had come to seem by now, with all the intervening years to give it weight—it had come to seem to John Des-

mond the most convincing logic a man could need. He brought it out therefore like a gambler playing a high trump-card, who lays it down with a braggart blow of his fist upon the table because he believes there is none to beat it. But Father Casey was no gambler. Indeed, there was a cautious man, playing by the value of the cards in his own hand rather than by hope of the poverty of his opponent's.

When John Desmond had made an end of speaking, the priest shook his head.

"'Twas a swift visitation of the Lord God," said he, "and He bringin' His judgment on ye before the night was gone into morning." Having said which, as amongst priests of the Church, it was beyond the human power in him to refrain from expressing his mind as amongst men, and he added: "But wasn't it a strange thing the doctor couldn't save her life, and ye tellin' him that was the way ye'd have it?"

"That damned doctor," said John Desmond, "couldn't save a cat, and it with nine lives to 'ut—he could not!" And having delivered himself emphatically of this dictum, he began brewing himself another bowl, when neither of them spoke again until the operation was over.

When the punch ladle was swimming in the steaming liquid once more and glasses were filled again to the brim, Father Casey leant an elbow on the table.

"Ye haven't told me," said he, "the terms of yeer bargain—and if 'tis annything like the wan ye made before, I dunno ought I to be listenin' to it at all."

"Ye'll have to listen," John Desmond declared, "and that's all there is about it." For by now, with all the drink he had taken, he was coming into the despotism of his kingdom. As Father Casey looked up at him, there was

that God-fearless glitter in his eye by which the little priest, from a long experience of those nights, knew he meant to brook no hindrance.

"Well, this is the way with me," he began. "I made an oath to the Almighty God the girrl should go into a convent. 'Twas to Mrs. Slattery I was swearing, the time we'd be standin' down in this room talkin' and the boy gone on the old gray mare like a livin' streak for the doctor. 'If it's the way herself overs it,' said I to her, 'I'll sind the little creature into a convent.' 'Shure, it might be a boy,' says she, and I said nothing to that. Why would I? Wasn't it like Jim Foley, and he doin' a deal with me over the roan mare had a spavin in her off hind-leg? 'What d'ye want?' says he. 'Thirty pounds,' said I. 'Right,' says he, 'if ye'll throw in the cart ye have,' says he, 'with one of the shafts is broken on it.' Shure, 'twas the mare I was sellin' and not the cart at all. And wasn't it a girrl I was bespeaking to Mrs. Slattery? Annyhow, 'twas the girrl I made me oath on, and I made no bargain, mind ye, for when I'd said me condition, didn't Mrs. Slattery shake her head and she tellin' me 'twas no good, the worrld knew, making a bargain with the Lord God. ' 'Tis all right, then,' says I. 'If 'tis a girrl, she shall go into a convent, annyhow, and the Almighty God can do what He likes with me.' Shure, I said that, and won't I keep to 'ut the time I'd be a breathin' man."

He stopped for breath then, as though to give earnest of his intentions, drinking as well from his tumbler of punch rather than lose the benefit of the opportunity. Father Casey waited in silence, having as yet no thought of committing himself.

The clatter of the glass as he put it down unsteadily on the table was the signal for John Desmond to proceed.

He left his hand there, holding the glass, for this was ever his attitude when discussing all matters having about them the delicacy of a bargain.

"Well, I've told ye," said he, "the way that damned fella of a doctor came down with his talk and he puttin' me in the cleft of a stick—the way I'd be damned whichever side I twisted. 'Ye'll save herself,' says I, 'and 'tis I'm tellin' ye.' Yirra, he went upstairs, and back he comes again in the break of mornin' and he sayin' she was dead."

For a moment he stopped speaking, as his mind sped back across the years, and he saw again that picture of the sunlight in the room as it fell in a brilliant patch upon Mrs. Slattery's body lying there in its disordered heap upon the floor.

Then, with the bitterness of a man who has wellnigh ceased his caring, he drew a deep breath and drank again.

"Well, there ye are," said he presently; "and that's the way things come to be like a man buyin' a sick horse, and she doctored the way he'd think he'd done a fine thing for himself till he'd got her home to the stables, and he glad could he sell her then for the price of a drink or an old hat or a pinny piece at all."

Father Casey sat nodding his head, for the matter was clear enough to him now. With no little honesty and graphic power of illumination, John Desmond had put the case in a fair way. It was, indeed, very little different to a man making a bad bargain over a beast, then seeing how best he could get rid of it. But in the austere mind of the priest, governing those gentle sympathies of the man, there stood forth in glaring distinctness that blot upon the bargain, the willful transgression of John Desmond against the

irrevocable laws of the Church. Deeply as the sentiments of the man were set in his heart, there was this matter of his clerical conscience to be accounted for, and over-ruling in him, despite himself, all those eager instincts within him to make allowances for the frailty of human nature.

Once a priest, as they say, always a priest, whence it must be supposed they mean that even the heart in a man cannot unfrock him. However that may be of some men, it was true of Father Casey. The priest in him struggled fiercely with the man, and the priest conquered.

When John Desmond saw that steely, ascetic look creep into the eyes behind those round-rimmed spectacles, he knew what justice he was about to receive. With no little purpose had he asked for those spectacles to be cleaned at the very commencement of their interview, but he had done so in the hopes of seeing through them that friendly twinkle, when he would be sure all was well with his cause. But now, before the priest had spoken, he knew the verdict that was to be passed, yet even then, with the inexhaustible cunning of his race, did not entirely give up hope of what the ultimate issue might be.

"Is it the way ye want to break yeer word to the Almighty God?" said Father Casey at last, and putting it that way left no doubt in John Desmond's mind regarding his opinion of the matter.

To accept it in that light, however, would be to threaten the very foundations of his case, and his wits as yet were too sharpened with the stimulation of his punch to let it go by unchallenged.

" 'Tis not breaking me word at all," said he, and there was a charm he could put into his voice when he chose—such charm as he used on occasions when making a deal in the market, and generally preparatory to calling the prospective

buyer a damned fool. " 'Tis not breaking me word at all, which is a thing I've never done since I've sold a horse in Waterford."

He leaned forward here across the table, so that his eyes were twinkling close to Father Casey's, and there was all that expression in his face of a man who is giving something away out of the sheer generosity of his heart.

"If I sold ye a filly," said he, "not more than six months old, and in two years' time I'd be comin' to ye and sayin', 'Look here, Father Casey, I'll take that creature back from ye, the way ye wouldn't have the trouble of breakin' her in yeerself—for 'tis a nasty job with the divvle she is, and I'm tellin' ye—I'll take her back, and be damned if I won't give ye a fine mare is fit to drive or ride, and she as quiet as a lamb and as fast as an American trotter would be goin' round them Parks they have in New York over,' wouldn't it be a fine deal, and divvle a bit of breakin' me word about it at all?"

He leaned back in his chair, as one who would say he could speak no fairer than that.

"Now, what would ye say to that?" he asked.

"Well," said Father Casey, "I should want to know first how valuable it was the filly had become, and I should want to know what was the matter with the mare was as quiet as a lamb and as fast as an American trotter."

"And I can tell ye that," replied John Desmond, and without a moment's hesitation. "I've watched the filly growin' up, the way she might be in yeer field over the wall in the park there, and I passin' it every day. I've watched her straightenin' out her limbs, and she's come to get a value in the heart of me because 'twas the way I'd bred and reared her meself. And that's why I want her back."

"Then what's the matter with the mare?" persisted Father Casey.

"There's nothing the matter with her at all. I've ridden her meself, and, begarra, she fits me like a glove; but 'tis the way I got her off another man, and I'd sooner have the filly and she not tried in harness than sixty mares like her in the stable."

He looked through the spectacles of the little priest, and there crept a glint of triumph into his own eyes as he read there the turning-point in his favor. It was the moment to clinch the bargain—the moment when the spinning of a coin with two heads to it would settle the matter then and there. He jumped to his feet and rang the bell.

"Don't speak," said he, as he stood there, leaning unsteadily against the wall. "Don't say a word till I show ye." And when Mrs. Slattery appeared at the door, he demanded that Miss Patricia should be brought down that moment to the dining-room.

"The poor darlin's in bed and asleep," said Mrs. Slattery.

"Bring her down," said he. "Shure, glory be to God, woman! ye'll be tellin' me I can't have me own horses out of the stables. Bring her down bed and all if ye don't want to waken her."

But the bed was too much for Mrs. Slattery's powers, having the bed of her own ample bosom to carry; wherefore Patricia appeared wrapped in a blanket with the simple edges of a white cotton nightshift peeping out of its folds.

With no little misgiving Mrs. Slattery put the child into his arms, but would not leave go of the bundle till he was well seated in his chair. Awake by now, Patricia was sitting up, rubbing her eyes in that candle-light, but making

no complaint against such treatment, which, after all, was not so unusual in that house.

"Pat," said John Desmond, "will ye tell Father Casey what ye are."

Our princess sat up in her bundle of blankets, and her little nightshift was unbuttoned at the neck and her eyes were all full of shadows and of sleep.

"I'se a filly," said she.

He had taken the risk like a real gambler. True, he called her that every night of his life, but it had been none too certain she would have answered to it then. He might have prompted her first to make the matter sure, but prompting would have robbed the moment of more than half its value.

When she answered, and like a bird to its mate, he flung his arms about her, but in the moment of kissing her put her away again.

"I won't give ye a kiss," said he solemnly, "for I've a drop taken." And without more sentiment to it than that, he put her back in Mrs. Slattery's arms, and shouted them off to bed like a man driving the pick of his cattle to the field.

"There now," said he. "There's me filly for ye."

"And where's the mare?" said Father Casey.

John Desmond stood up to his feet and drank one long draught from his tumbler. His eyes glittered as he drank, and he shook from his shoulders to his knees like a man in the heat of some mighty purpose.

"Here's the mare I got from another man!" he cried; and taking the glass in his hand, he flung it with all his strength across the room. It struck the wall between the windows with a sharp and ringing report, and fell in a thousand pieces to the floor.

V

A TAILPIECE

AFTER the primary terms of a bargain have been agreed upon, there are many details to investigate before the business can be said to be complete or hands may finally be shaken to clinch the matter.

Father Casey, watching the swift flight of that glass as it sped glittering through the air, was in much the mind of a man who, in the capacity of agent, feels that he has effected a good deal for his master.

A cleric may be the last to admit it, but though he may be more, truly he is no less, than agent of the affairs of God on that human estate where the souls of men are reared to the far and ultimate perfection.

Now John Desmond, drinking his soul to damnation, was in more need of salvage than that pink and white creature with her coal-black hair, her deep blue eyes, and her little cotton nightshift. Convent or no convent, there was little fear for her soul to that astute but gentle-hearted shepherd, so long as the father in whose constant company she was to become a woman had quit himself of his besotted habits and made himself a clean and sober man before God.

Here, indeed, was a moment when the agent must act, and upon his own initiative, in the interests of that master who employs him. Father Casey recognized all his responsibilities, and came to them with a clear mind.

It was a better transaction, he knew, to save the soul of John Desmond than insure the salvation of Patricia, who by no means, other than that disastrous example of her father's, could be said to be in jeopardy. But were he to

become a sober man, then might two souls be gathered into the flock, and with that keen eye of a shepherd husbanding his sheep, Father Casey saw all the prospects of a double purpose to be served.

Yet there was one thing that bid him hesitate. John Desmond had thrown an empty glass against the wall. That last draught he had taken before he flung the tumbler from his hand had not escaped the keen observation of the little priest.

There, indeed, was a deep and subtle indication of the force of habit upon the character of John Desmond which Father Casey was not slow to recognize.

"How does the Almighty God know," said he, in the midst of that silence falling heavily upon them after the brittle detonation of the splintering glass—"how does the Almighty God know ye'll give up the drink?"

"Glory be to God, man! Shure, doesn't He know everything!" exclaimed John Desmond—an argument that Father Casey found it difficult in that first moment to oppose, until it occurred to him that the Divine knowledge might as likely be of one thing as of another.

Taking off his spectacles and wiping them, he gently suggested that aspect of the case.

"Maybe 'tis the way He knows ye won't," said he.

"Yirra, man! haven't I smashed me glass to smithereens!" retorted John Desmond.

"Ye have so," said Father Casey, "but ye took the precaution of emptying it first, and I dunno is an empty glass broken much more than the sign of a man and he breakin' his promises rather than binding them."

If it had not been for that ugly look that crept into John Desmond's eyes at that moment, Father Casey might have gone on until he had persuaded himself there was no real

assurance of a true bargain at all. But here was a man in a fervent exaltation of spirit, submitting to a caviling criticism of his most earnest oath. For if ever John Desmond meant what he said, it was on that late evening in April when he stood making his bargain with this shrewd and practical agent of God.

"Shure, ye can take it or leave it!" he cried; and drove his fist upon the table in just that manner and with just those words with which he put an end to many a haggling in the market-place. "And I'll swear this," he added, "if ever ye find me the worse for the drink again, ye can take that slip of a thing upstairs and put her into a convent, nightshift and all, and may I never set eyes on her again in this world, for 'tis damn well shure I shouldn't in the next."

This was fair speaking enough, and the priest was now well satisfied with the bargain as it stood; the man in Father Casey looked out through those round-rimmed spectacles with a suspicious brightness in his eyes. For drunk as he was, and standing there swaying for support against the table's edge, there was all the pride and defiance of a stout-hearted gentleman in John Desmond, to say which of any man is to crown him with all the attributes of a king.

For what else, indeed, is he in this story? And if ever proof were needed of how a king consulted the wisest man in his kingdom, seeking to destroy the enchantment cast upon the princess his daughter at the hour of her birth, surely there were enough that April evening when Father Casey came ambling through the fields on the back of the old mare to Waterpark.

A fairy tale, first and foremost, is a true story. Would a child ever believe it if it were not? For that which takes place in a fairy story, the slaughter of the giant and the

killing of the dragon, the triumph of the prince and the ever-aftering happiness of the princess—these are not the things that happen, but the things that are. And the things that are, are true, and the things that happen are false. They are no more than all those accidents in life by which one man breaks his leg that was meant to be whole, while another takes the life of his neighbor which a million years and more had conspired in the intention that it should be kept.

You may kill giants, for they are neither more nor less than the embodiment of evil. Such slaughter as this is in the true meaning of things, and with but the heart of a child you will believe in its thrilling narrative. But to kill your neighbor—there is no child will give credence to a story recounting such happenings as that. For whether he may strum on the piano from morning till night, and however unpleasant his countenance may be, your neighbor is made, no less than you, in the image of God, and there must be some good in him.

The whole matter is, we have left out childhood behind us, and now the things that happen seem more real than all the things that are. For the fairy tale with its true story we have substituted the modern novel with its false. Princes and princesses are out of fashion. In this latter-day narrative kings and queens are dead. Art has grown scornful of a happy ending. Our stories can be told no longer by the light of the fire, for the searching days of that false light of realism are full upon them.

Well, who cares? Here at least is a tale for a winter's night, with an elm log making ladders for the climbing flames. The hearts of the listening children are all I want. Give me those, and you may shut the door and leave us by that winter's fire alone.

BOOK IV

THE PRINCE COMES BACK TO HIS FATHER'S KINGDOM

"And in days to come, the Prince was tired of his wanderings, and his mind returned to thoughts of the King his father."

The Dream Maiden.

I

THE RETURN

SIX years wove their threads into the pattern of this story before Charles Stuart returned from his adventures to the town of Waterford.

Round the bend of Hook Head, past Duncannon and Ballyhack, there sailed one day at about four o'clock of an afternoon early in April a brig of no great tonnage, with all the signs of ugly weather about her spars and ropes. The roof of the deck-house had been blown away or washed to splinters beneath a heavy sea. A tarpaulin had taken its place and, in the light breeze of that April afternoon, flapped idly at the shrouds where the stay-ropes had not bound it, beating a cheerful tattoo against the deck-house walls. The top-sail and top-gallant yards had vanished from her foremast. Far away on the Atlantic they were floating, drifting wreckage some sailor or a passing ship might well send a prayer after, picturing the unhappy ship that had found her rest about that place.

Over the taffrail the sailors were leaning on their folded arms, with all that quiet contented look a sailor wears as, after a hard voyage, he comes at last to port. From somewhere about the ship the sound of a concertina lifted into the warm breeze and was carried in ripples across the blue water, breaking in little waves of sound in the ears of those who heard it from the shore.

The captain was at the wheel, steering her up the river

under just so much canvas as was left to them after the storms they had weathered in the Atlantic; and one amongst those four men leaning over the ship's side, with eyes bent eagerly upon the familiar places he had not seen for six adventurous years, was Charles Stuart, the prince of this fairy tale, who comes again into the story from the uttermost ends of the earth.

No little fortune had been made, as would any man have done, traveling with a free lance in those days. However much it was, he carried it with him, well secured about his body in some portable form. For in such company as was sailing the seas at that time a man had need to turn his money into kind and have it close about his person.

As a sailor working before the mast he had come home, suffering all those discomforts that are to be met with in a small ship.

But it was life as he lived it, free of all the responsibilities save that of the wholeness of his own skin. Indeed, he had learned to alternate his life with periods of luxury and hard living, enjoying the first until the call of the second, with all its promise of adventure, became too loud in his ears, when, from a span of ease in one of those tropic cities, he would start off into the mad race of the stream once more, with little care as to where it carried him.

Thus, after six years' jolting against the lives of men, holding his own at none too high a price, he came to think with a gentler mind of that old man with his seals and his sealing-wax, his wines and his spirits, taking his risk as well in the peaceful little town of Waterford.

There is the homing instinct in all men, that sets in after a swift reaction upon that fever of wanderlust which, when once in the blood, can never be eradicated. Charles Stuart

thought of his father, gambling with those overwhelming stakes in the game he had chosen to play, and the thought that, for all he knew, the old man might be then suffering the merciless penalty of the law, broken in spirit and shattered in hope of ever holding the hand of a friend again, so pricked his conscience that at last he could resist it no longer.

Collecting all the little fortune he had made, he bought himself a sailor's rig and applied at the docks for a berth before the mast of the next ship sailing homeward. As chance would have it, there was one bound for the port of Dublin. He signed papers and went aboard.

What weather they beat through might well have been seen even by an inexperienced landsman from the condition of the brig alone, as she made her way up the river that April afternoon. A storm had been blowing for four days, and a choking fog was with it too, when they knew they must be off the coast of Ireland. Knowing the treachery of that coast, the skipper steered his course well out to sea, swearing that as soon as he could see his hand before his face he would run her into port and take his ease from all those battering winds while they were seeing to his tackle. Then one morning the mist had lifted, the April sunshine trolled on the decks and dried them white, like linen on a line. There were the blue skies after the dismal waste of gray, and there on the port bow, shimmering in the sunny distance, lay the coast of Ireland, like a stone of emerald in a marquise ring.

It was not long before Charles Stuart, better acquainted with that coast than any on the ship, made out the white tower of the lighthouse at Roche's Point and the gray walls of Trabolgan House standing on the lonely edge of the cliff.

"There's Queenstown Harbor!" he shouted to the captain at the wheel. "If she'll take a point or two you can run her straight in in an hour or less."

"She'll not take another damned point," shouted the captain, and cast his eyes up at those gaps in his rigging where the fore-top and top-gallant yards had been singing their song on the mast only a week before.

A smile sprang up into the eyes of Charles Stuart, watching the line of that glittering land.

"You'll have to make Waterford, then," he called back above the still high note of the dropping wind; and Waterford they made, coming down the river between Dollar Bay and Knockavelish Head at four o'clock in the afternoon.

At Cheek Point the excisemen came aboard, and Charles Stuart went down below in readiness to be gone. As soon as the anchor was cast, the rest of the crew, intending to go ashore, quickly followed him, and when he came up again on deck there was not a man to be seen where for the last three weeks, passing through that weather, men had been coming and going about their duties day and night.

He drew a contented breath as he stood looking up the river towards the spires of the churches and the roofs of the houses, all returning now to his partly awakened memory. So he might have stood for some minutes, enjoying in anticipation the prospects of the days before him, but at that instant every other interest was scattered from his mind by the sound of his father's name, spoken in a strange man's voice.

He turned round. The hatches were off, and there, at his elbow almost, but out of sight, were the excisemen examining the cargo of the brig.

"They should be starting from Stradbally tonight," said

the voice, "and we've got men ready on the road to follow them the whole way. 'Tis the last bottle Sandy Stuart 'll sell to the gintry of this town for many a long day."

Who would be starting from Stradbally that night? Where were they going to follow them? And what had it all to do with his father, than whom, by their talk of Sandy Stuart, they could have meant none other? It needed little imagination, coupling his remembrance of that underground passage from the Hole in the Wall with the fact that these were excisemen, for Charles to answer that last question, and with little chance of error.

Over some ingenious transaction of smuggling they were hot upon his father's tracks, and it mattered little what Stradbally had to do with it. His plain, undoubted business it was, to get into the town as soon as possible, and warn the old man before it was too late. For now, with what he had learned of life, there was none of that horror of his mind when he thought upon his father's illicit dealings. He had seen piracy on the high seas, murder done in hot blood and in cold. Ships he knew of that would never return to port again, which more, or might it not be considered less, than an act of God, had dispatched to their last resting-place. Beside such deeds as these, an evasion of customs was no more than a mere game of hide-and-seek; but the consequences were serious enough, and he felt his blood run hot and ready for adventure at the thought of the danger in which his father stood.

In the boat that had brought the excisemen he contrived, with two of the other sailors, to be taken up the river to the town. Taking the stroke oar, he questioned them casually as they sat in the stern, relying upon that egotism of a man which finds eternal favor in the conversation of his own shop.

They maintained an air of secrecy, however, hinting darkly of the surprise it would be to some in that town if they knew the doings of their next-door neighbors. But enough, and more than enough, had been said for Charles to know that action was necessary, and without delay.

As soon as he had landed, therefore, on the quay-side—and by then it was five o'clock and after—he made his way with all haste up to Lady Lane, having assured himself that the excisemen had formed no suspicion from his questioning and were not following him.

There was no time to give rein to all the memories and recollections that would have crowded back into his mind as he ascended that little flight of steps and rang the bell of the old house in Lady Lane. They would be starting from Stradbally that night, the excisemen had said, and with the sun already flaming in its gradual descent down the sky, there was not a moment to be wasted.

The servant who opened the door gazed at this man with his rough sailor's clothes in open amazement as he strode into the hall and closed the door behind him.

"Where's your master?" said he in a quick voice. "Where's my father?" he added, to give her confidence, for there was that in the look of her, betokening an imminent desire to scream. "I'm Mr. Charles Stuart," he went on at once. "I've just come back from abroad, and I must see him at once."

Still she was reduced to a state of helpless inactivity. Therefore, standing in the hall he left her and went into the office. A boy sat there at the desk where once he had sat; where that memorable morning in his life he had broken his quill pen and climbed down from the office stool to find his father in the cellar. Thither he went now, saying no word of explanation to the boy, who, like the servant in the

hall, stared after him, bewildered by his sudden entrance and sudden departure.

The door into the cellar was open. This meant, without doubt, that the old man was there; and there he found him, just as he had left him six years before, decanting his wines into their bottles with all the gentle innocence of the most honest wine-merchant in the world.

"Father," said Charles, and, looking up, the old man dropped the bottle from his hands, added to which so great was his amazement that he did not even turn his eyes to the ground to see how much he had spilt.

For one moment he drew himself up to the fullness of his height in a swift remembrance of his paternal dignity and the recollection of the way this son of his had treated him; but in a ready anticipation of that—for a son does not forget the weaknesses in his father's character, though he may be away from home for twenty years—Charles thrust out his hand, now grown firm and powerful, seized upon his father's and wrung it hard.

"None of that damned pride," said he, with a laugh the sea had bred in him. "What's more, there's no time to say are you glad or sorry to see me back again. You've got to tell me, and tell me quick, what you're doing at Stradbally tonight? What's up? What's happening? You can tell me the whole truth of it. I'm not a boy of sixteen now, sucking a quill pen on that office stool upstairs. What's happening at Stradbally tonight that you've got a hand in, because something must be done at once?"

"I'm no thinkin'——" began Sandy.

"No, you needn't think," interrupted Charles—"there's no time for that. The excisemen are on your tracks, and 'tis they are thinking they're going to catch you out tonight."

Whatever or however much his son knew, Sandy was wise enough in his old age to realize—if from the grip of that hand alone—that he had a friend, and one to help him out when most he needed it. Without any beating about the bush, he confessed everything: the breaking off of his negotiations with O'Shaughnessy; the temptation that still clung to him to participate in smuggled goods; the final transactions direct with the smugglers themselves; and the danger he knew he ran of discovery for some time past.

"There's a wee bit of an island off the coast at Stradbally," said he, "and a roomy wee spot on the south side of it wi' muckle room to hide a lag or twa."

Here, he told Charles, they brought their smuggled goods by night, discharging their infamous cargo and sailing on into Waterford in the broad light of sun—gay and content to meet the customs gowks, wi' ne'er a fright o' bein' bagged.

To this same spot, known as Gull Island, a small boat would put off from Stradbally, with lines out and nets, perhaps, ostensibly for the fishing or to gather sea-birds' eggs on the island, returning some hours later with their hidden burden, and from thence, when it was collected in some quantity, sending it up by road to Waterford on donkey-butts covered with sprats or fish of various sorts caught off the coast.

Such an excursion was taking place that night, and now, judging by the news Charles had brought with him, the excise officers had got wind of it. Unless the men were prevented from making that journey upon which they would be starting in little more than an hour's time, the fat of Sandy Stuart's reputation would be in the fire, and he would be a ruined man.

"And mind ye, laddie," said he piteously, "'tis not as if

I wad be gettin' muckle stuff this way. 'Tis a puir stingy lot they bring me; ye wadna think it worth the while."

Charles was not for considering the nicer refinements of his guilt. The men must be stopped, and he knew there was no one but himself in that place to stop them.

"How many miles to Stradbally is it by the sea?" he asked.

"Oh, laddie, 'tis not quick by the sea. Ye wadna make the harbor's mouth under an hour or more."

"How many miles by the road, then?"

" 'Twould be twenty—and sic a road!"

"Have you got a horse?"

Sandy shook his head.

"Where could I find a horse that could go?"

The old man told him of a likely place in the town, begging him to be careful of the reasons he gave for wanting a horse at that hour of the day.

"They're awfu' curious," he said. "They'll be spierin' ye to ken wha ye are." Then, looking up at his son, half with a twinkle in his eyes, half in stinted admiration, he added: "Can ye ride a horse, laddie?"

"It wouldn't make much difference if I couldn't," said Charles. "I'd get there."

The old man stood there at the foot of the cellar stairs watching his son as he ran up the steps three at a time, and inevitably comparing his departure with that he had stood there a witness to six years before. Then, in the shame of his guilt, he was plucking a button from his coat; but now he stood rubbing his hands, with a smile expanding all the features of his crafty and dryly humorous face.

"We shall get on fine," said he aloud—"we shall get on fine now that he's learnt the ins and oots of the bees'-ness."

II

THE STRADBALLY ROAD

WAITING no longer than necessary to change his clothes, Charles Stuart was soon out in the town again, and with his bargain made over the horse.

"I've a long way to ride tonight," said he. "Is she fresh?"

"Have ye ever seen wet paint?" said the ostler, and lifted his eyes to heaven for the witness of God. "And where are ye goin'?" he asked.

"Clonmel," said Charles, giving any name at a venture.

The ostler brought his lips to a whistle and blew, but no sound was forthcoming.

"I can't whistle," said he—"me mouth is dry. But Clonmel is the hell of a long way."

"How far?"

"Twenty-four miles if it's an inch."

"Will she do it tonight?"

"She would, and forty. Shure, ye could ride that mare to death, but ye could never ride her tired."

Charles mounted into the saddle, and gave the ostler that wherewith he could wet his lips to whistle if he chose.

"Ye'd best take the road to Fiddown and Carrick," said he, as Charles rode out of the stable-yard; then, turning to the stable-boy, he remarked: "'Tis himself 'll be tired and not the mare at all when he comes all of a heap into Clonmel this night."

In that respect he was not far wrong, but it was half-way on the road to Stradbally, with the sun just fallen behind the lines of the hills of Drum, that Charles began to feel the weight of the journey he had set himself to make. Nine

more miles there were along that uneven road, and if he did not reach Stradbally before the light had failed, the men would be loaded up and started on their journey, when any action of his to turn them back might be observed by those set in hiding to watch their movements.

Aching now in every limb, for he was no horseman, he still pressed on his way, following, as he had been directed, that road to Stradbally down by the coast which runs through Ballylegat. It was rutted and uneven, as many of those Irish roads are that pursue the unbeaten track. So far as the condition of the horse was concerned, he had only his wits to go by, knowing very little of the flesh he rode or the signs by which he might read the symptoms of exhaustion. Cantering was easiest to his aching back and brought him quicker on his journey, but after every half-mile or so the wretched horse would refuse the pace and fall into its ambling trot, shaking him from head to foot and setting such strain upon his advance as he knew could not be borne for long.

On the left of him, as he came down upon the coast, lay the sea, simmering down to the smoothness of glass after the storms that had fermented it. Once he laughed, and laughed aloud, at the thought of himself turning landsman, coming straight from that soothing rocking of a ship to this violent means of progress, upheaving every bone in his body.

The laugh had scarcely left his lips when, with a sudden swerve at something moving that had caught her eye from behind the bushes at the side of the road, the mare shied violently, and before he knew what was about, Charles found himself out of the saddle and tumbling heavily to the ground. He had fallen on the grass at the side of the road, and was not hurt. The next second he was to his feet, thinking only of one thing, to catch the mare before she escaped him. The frightened beast was standing there, shaking in

all her quarters, never offering to move, but with nostrils distended, pumping out those two white jets of steam into the cooling air, and with wide eyes staring in her fright.

He took the bridle and gently patted her neck, now for the first time beginning to wonder what it was that had made that fear in her.

"Woa, beauty! Woa, mare," he murmured into her ear; and as he stood there patting her, thanking his luck the affair had been no worse, there emerged two men from behind a clump of gorse growing in a field beyond the wall that skirted the road.

He looked up quickly, realizing then the thing she had shied at, as swiftly appreciating, too, how he had come now upon the full tide of his adventure. These were the men lying in wait for the smuggler's cart. There was no mistaking the odd circumstances or the strange manner of their appearance on that lonely road, in hiding, too, behind that clump of gorse.

He said nothing as he watched them climbing over the low stone wall, waiting until one of them, evidently the spokesman, addressed him first.

"That was a nasty toss ye had," said the man agreeably. "Were ye hurt at all?"

"No, I wasn't hurt," said Charles, and was conscious without definite suspicion that the second man had come up to the mare, patting her and muttering quieting expressions to calm her fears.

"Ye've been going at the hell's own pace," said the first man, looking at Charles and then at the horse, then looking at Charles once more, and with the shrewd eyes those men of the law acquire from long suspicion of every second person they meet. "Ye must have come far by the sweat she's in, and yeerself there with it rollin' down yeer face."

Charles wiped the drops of perspiration off his cheeks, thinking quickly of some feasible excuse he could give to allay their suspicion of his presence on that road. If the situation could be evaded without force, so much the better. He regarded a struggle for it with no alarm; but they were two to one, and six years' experience of strenuous adventure had taught him the value of discretion.

But in those quick moments there was little time to invent. He scarcely knew that country-side through which he rode. An excuse, if he made it, must be a good one, or it would only rouse their suspicions the more.

"I'm not much of a horseman," said he; "a couple of miles along a road like this finishes me. He blew out his breath and mopped his face with his handkerchief, and stood there smiling fatuously at this man, to show what an innocent fool he was.

" 'Tis more than two miles ye've come this day," remarked the man imperturbably, "for there's no place along this road the way you've come between here and Waterford."

Charles had not considered that, and still mopped his face to hide the worst of his confusion.

"Oh, yes, I've come from Waterford," said he; "but how many miles is that?"

" 'Tis a good ten, and what a fool ye'd be if ye didn't know ut."

The tone of solicitous inquiry had dropped suddenly from his voice, just as in an unexpected moment a woman drops her veil and reveals the true expression of her face. Charles put his handkerchief away in his pocket, and every nerve in his body set in readiness for the struggle he felt every moment was becoming more inevitable. Yet still, until all hope of avoiding it was gone, he assumed the disarming manner of a witless fool.

"Is it as much as that?" said he. "Well, I thought I might have come pretty far. The old horse has shaken me to pieces. Why, I can hardly stand now," and he laughed foolishly in the man's face, and swayed on his legs as he stood.

"Then, what's brought ye out here in the name of God, along this starvin' road?" The question was rapped out now with but little concealment of a determination to satisfy the interrogator's suspicions.

"Well, I can't see what that is to you," replied Charles amiably. "But if you want to know, I've got business in Dungarvan."

" 'Tis a damned long way out of your road ye're goin' to get there, then," he was told, and with little of the sympathy a stranger might have shown him for his mistake. "Shure, if ye'd wanted to go to Dungarvan, ye should have gone through Kilmacthomas. " 'Tis to Stradbally ye're goin', and damn well ye know it too!"

This was a plain challenge, before which no assumption of feeble-mindedness was any longer of use. Charles dropped the bridle he had been holding all this time, and there was that same laugh at the clear sight of danger in his eyes as no man could make any mistake about. The man took a step backwards. Charles cast a swift look over his shoulder at the man behind him, but it was too late. Before he could turn, his arms were caught at the elbows and pinioned behind him. At the same instant the other came at him, hands up and all that wild light in his eyes of an Irishman entering a fight.

There was but one thing to do. The man holding his arms was no more to be feared than for the vice in which he held him, and to expend energy forcing himself from that would be to lay him the more open to the second attack.

But his feet were free, and no way of fighting is ignominious when the odds are against you. As the other rushed at him, Charles measured distance with the quick eye of a man who has learnt the art of delivering a blow, and kicked his shins with all the force he had.

With a yell of pain the man fell back limping to the side of the road, and in that second of respite, Charles had wrenched himself free of the hands that held him. With a quick breath and a laugh in it, he rushed to the loose stone wall that skirted the road, and stood there with a shield to his back where there was no fear of being taken by surprise again.

"Come on, you ——s!" he shouted. "Come on! Don't let us waste any time about it!"

They came with a rush together, the first roaring like a bull and mad with the pain in his shin. If there are any wits to be found in the making of a man, judgment comes to him quick when they are in his possession.

Having been spokesman for the two of them, Charles judged the first of his opponents to be the better mark for his blow. And whatever may have been proved to the contrary in the fairy tales of long ago, it would not be believed to be possible in a fairy tale that marches with the times for a man to deliver two blows at the same time. Charles chose the spokesman of that little party for his mark, and leapt forward one step with a swing of his left arm to meet him. The blow fell clean and true with that sound, half smash, half thud, which is poetry and music enough to those who like that sort of thing; clean and true it fell with all its force upon his mouth, and there he was staggering back again, spitting blood and with a tooth in his throat, as Charles was borne backwards by the weight of the other's impact.

Both fell in a heap to the ground, and it was an unpleasant moment for him then, for, seeing the advantage gained, the spokesman again was at him. Still limping he came, and blowing the blood between his lips, as Charles bore the weight of his body round to bring himself uppermost. It was a moment of chance and a matter of inspiration. He freed an arm from the man beneath him and caught the first about the ankles as he came, and there went the three of them struggling on the grass by the side of that road together.

It was not until then and in all that confusion that his mind caught at the memory of the revolver he always carried in his pocket. The possession of a firearm is valuable not only for its use. If only he could come by his feet again, he knew there was little fear of being unable to keep them quiet. And there, twenty yards from them down the road, was the mare, with her head down, still snorting out her jets of steam, too exhausted even to turn her head towards home.

Charles drew a breath for the effort he knew it must be, and gripping his fingers about the throat of the man beneath him, he flung a leg over the body of the other and turned his body round. The great strength he had and the sudden impulse of that effort was more than those two had bargained for. Slowly, like a man lifting a mighty load, with a deep grunting of his breath, he turned them over, until, with a shout and a laugh, he had leapt free and left them to scramble to their feet.

The first thing that met their eyes was a revolver, addressing itself first to one and then to the other, and Charles Stuart laughing at their bewilderment.

"Now," said he, gasping for his breath and laughing all in one. "What the hell's all this about? It's no good your

moving there; you'll get a bit of lead in you if you do. Six chambers and they're all full. Here's one of 'em. He lowered his revolver and fired at a great dock-leaf that was growing by the side of the road. The bullet buried itself with a thud in the soft grass. They turned and looked at the neat round hole in the dock-leaf, and the comical expression on their faces as they looked back at him would have been food for laughter for any man. Charles Stuart laughed like a child.

"It makes a pretty little mark, eh?"

"What are you up to, in the name of God?" asked the spokesman, visibly affected by this little display.

"What am I up to? Good God! That's what I want to know about you. D'you think you're playing highwaymen, stopping a stranger like this? What the devil does it matter to you that I've got business in Dungarvan? And what else do you want to stop me for except to get my purse? If I weren't in a hurry, I'd drive the two of you back to Waterford. How's your leg, my friend? D'you think you could do the walk?"

The spokesman grunted in his throat.

"We don't believe ye're after goin' to Dungarvan," said he. "There are things doin' on the road this night, and 'tis yourself is mixed up in 'em."

"If I had time," said Charles quickly, "I should be greatly interested to hear what they were. I've got me suspicions that it's merely a dirty game of highway robbery; that the two of you heard I was carrying some money to Dungarvan, and thought you'd be more than a match for me. Well," he smiled, "we know all about that now, don't we, and not needing your permission any longer I think I'll move on. You needn't follow me. You stop there and have a look at that dock-leaf."

They looked at him, half believing now, and, with a word to the pair of them standing there disconsolately in the road, Charles Stuart went after the mare, mounted her, and with a smile on his face rode off towards that twilight that was gathering over the sea.

In less than an hour he came with his panting beast into Stradbally, in time to save the tattered honor of the king his father.

III

A TAILPIECE

IN the fallen twilight, with night coming along fast at its heels and when his business had been done, Charles Stuart set out again on his journey home by the road that leads to Kilmacthomas. It was no wish of his, for his father's sake, to meet again with his acquaintances on that lower road by the coast. Wherefore he chose to come by the highway to Dungarvan and so conspired with Fate and Chance—the names we give our modern witches—to enter the gates of that palace of Enchantment.

To this palace all men come, and there, for all men, lies the princess for their wakening. Whatever the spell of the Enchantment may be, theirs is the power to set her free; and to some it comes in all the gray, drab colors of what they choose to call reality, to some with all the shimmering colors of romance.

BOOK V

THE PRINCESS GROWS UP

"She was like a lily that opens its buds at sunrise, and she grew through all the whispers of the day."

The Stilt-Maker.

I

KEEPING THE OATH

PATRICIA grew like a sapling ash, whose buds were no blacker than her eyes or shoots straighter than her limbs. One and all, the girls of that family were coined in the mold of their father, but none so deeply minted as Patricia. There was his black hair, his dark eyes, that long upper lip he had, making for a large mouth, which, in the woman she was to be, offered no great promise of beauty, but allowed in exchange for character, between which no man in his senses hesitates for long.

The two boys went their mother's way, almost wanting in their wits at times, it seemed, as the male stock of those old Irish families often are. However, they were wild enough creatures in their way, bound for no lasting good; but it was a gentle way compared with the devil's daring of their sisters.

It was doubtless by reason of that arresting resemblance to himself that John Desmond, despite the fact that she had brought him the death of the best beloved, clung to Patricia and offered his greatest sacrifice to keep her by him.

As it came upon evening, and at about that time when it would have been his wont to be ringing the bell for Mrs. Slattery, he would send for her to be brought to him, and in much the same manner as he sent for his bowl of punch.

"Come here to me now," he would say as she appeared at the door—"come here to me, ye young divvle, ye." And

setting her on his knee, he would ask her if she were as good as a drop of the drink to a man, and he with a drought on him would be blowing the dust out of his mouth.

"Ye can give me a kiss," she had replied on one of these occasions—"ye can give me a kiss and see which would ye like best." Such a coquette as that she was, even in those days.

"Where did ye learn that divilry from?" he asked her when the kiss was given, to which she had shaken her head, tossing her black hair, as little conscious of the nature of her sex that had taught her, as is any girl coming blindfold to the gates of womanhood.

Sophie and Margaret, the two eldest, these had long left school, and for two years at least had tasted of the glories of dances in Waterford or wherever a floor was cleared within their reach in the county. God knows how they dressed themselves on those occasions. Wherever they went the women stared at them, frankly open-mouthed, considerate enough to drop their voices in criticism to a whisper, but speaking plainly enough with their eyes. Indeed, it needs one with a brilliant wit to say more in such a purpose with her tongue than she does with those eyes that slowly travel up and down, like scissors ripping stitches every inch.

However, they did dress themselves, and it was all done long nights over the fire in their bedrooms; and however much the women stared, the men were not slow in coming forward. No sooner was it known that the Misses Desmond were in the room than there were the black coats about them, like rooks in a field of corn.

And at this time, until respectively they were sixteen and seventeen years of age, Patricia and Josephine were driving into Waterford in an old gig to the Misses Whelan's school for the daughters of gentlemen, in Lady Lane. And all this

time John Desmond was keeping his bargain with the Lord God, becoming by evening a man of sour temper and uncongenial ways, from which Patricia was the only one to rouse him.

To no one in that house had he spoken of his contract with Father Casey, and, indeed, had bound the priest to secrecy about it.

"Let 'em all think 'tis the way she's goin' into a convent," said he. "'Twill do no harm to her, for 'tis a little divvle she is entirely. Her eyes weren't made for the good of her soul, I'm thinkin'."

But this was not his purpose for keeping the secret close, and it is unlikely that even Father Casey supposed it to be so. Having given his word, John Desmond was a man with some pride in it, however little pleasure the gift afforded him. Fully aware of all the subtleties of temptation, both when alone in the house and in company with others about his daily round, he would not have it said by all who knew him that here was a man who, before God and having given his word, could not so much as keep a glass from his lips. There always lurked in the precincts of his mind the looming possibility of failure, and until the sight of a punch-bowl had no further interest for him, he was determined to keep silence about his vow.

On the first evening after his promise to Father Casey had been made, Mrs. Slattery was waiting in that bare, gaunt kitchen where she reigned alone—waiting for the accustomed sound of the bell, with the glasses, the bowl, the lemon and hot water, all set out in readiness on the table. But no bell rang.

The clock on the mantelpiece had stopped. That was not surprising, for it was seldom wound. She might be wrong in her calculations of the time, though long habit of doing things

by instinct through the routine of the days had enabled her to dispense, and without error, with both clock and scales in that kitchen. She went to the door of the dining-room and listened, thinking perhaps Miss Patricia might be there, and that with the distraction of the child's company her master had forgotten the invariable habit of ringing the bell.

No sound of talking or of laughter came from within. She had waited there a full minute, and then was about to open the door in order to see if the room were empty, when the sound of John Desmond's voice uttering a mighty curse upon men, women, children, and all things living, sent her scurrying back to the kitchen to fetch the tray. It was obvious in her conclusions that he had forgotten to ring the bell, and, thinking he had done so, was sitting there with all his impatience, cursing her for her absence.

For a woman of her proportions, she traveled swiftly, and was back again at the dining-room door with the tray in her hands in quicker time than it takes to write of it.

"Ye may swear ye did, but ye niver rung the bell," said she, when she had pushed the door open with her foot and was standing there before him, ready to anticipate all the curses he might hurl upon her.

"When did I say I rang the bell?" he snapped at her, and sat there like an animal at bay, with one eye on the tray in her hands, just as a hunted beast will look at its pursuer.

"Shure, didn't I hear ye cursin' in here," retorted Mrs. Slattery—"the way I'd 'a' been afraid to open the door if I hadn't known what ye wanted and could give it ye to keep ye quiet."

With one last glance at the punch-bowl, at the steam rising out of the hot water-jug, at the lemon with its bright yellow rind and that black bottle that had all the appearance of a

wonderful chalice of jet to him, John Desmond turned his head away.

"Will ye take the damned things out of the room," he shouted, "and never let me see the cursed sight of them again!"

Now, whether it was that the surprise of this command was too great for her, or that she had been standing there over-long with that heavily burdened tray, but lock, stock and barrel, the whole business fell right out of her hand to the floor, and the cork, which she had already drawn from the bottle being absent, the whisky was fast spilling out over the carpet.

With the instinct that rose first in the nature of him, John Desmond had rushed to the bottle and picked it up before the contents were wasted.

" 'Tis a damned clumsy woman ye are!" he shouted, lifting the tray and standing the bottle back upon it. "Where do you get all that fat from, I dunno, in this starvin' house. God knows 'tis double wages I ought to be payin' ye, for ye're the size of two."

"I am!" said she, and red in her rage; "and don't I do the work of six, and the world knows 'tis not always the pay of wan I'd be gettin'!"

He had stood there shouting with laughter at the wit she had, and telling her he would give her a fat and handsome present next time he sold a horse to advantage; which, indeed, he did, clapping five pounds one day into her hand when she least expected it.

But then, at that moment, there was little pleasure to her in his laughter. She had set the things to rights on the tray once more, wondering what else she could fling at him in repayment for his gibes about her ever-increasing proportions. And there he had stood, still laughing, while she re-

arranged the tray, until, seeing the wetness on his fingers, where in picking it up the whisky had spilled over his hand, he put them to his mouth and sucked the liquid off. Then the laughter had gone from him, and like a stone that falls into the depths of a well.

"In the name of God!" he cried out suddenly, "will ye take that blasted stuff away?" and wondering at this more than at anything she had wondered at in her life, Mrs. Slattery bore the tray back to the kitchen, setting it down again on the table with a "Glory be to God!" that came in the nature of an explosion from between her lips.

II

A COUNCIL OF SIX

TO the idea of going into a convent Patricia settled her mind without so much as a thought about it one way or another. All around her there were girls in large families, growing up to the very gates of womanhood, pledged to become nuns from their cradles, and leaving the world they had played in without the faintest shadows of regret—indeed, eager, like children, for the honor to which it had pleased God to call them.

To this spiritual end, certainly, she was kept in continual mind by the devout Mrs. Slattery. The more the good woman fell a victim to Patricia's charms of devilment, the more she gave herself to suffer the flagellation of these perpetual reminders. The more she found her heart going out to that untamable little creature, the deeper she cherished the thought of the honor it was to be.

Catching Patricia one day feeding the donkey with lumps

of sugar in the kitchen, she had first smacked her soundly across the head, then driven the sorely tempted beast out into the yard with stout blows of a broom-handle. But when she came back, she had seated the child on her knee, untied the apron from about her waist, and, with the aid of a shawl making the veil and gimp about Patricia's head, had gone into a transport of ecstasies over the beautiful nun she would make.

"Oh, won't ye be a darlin'!" she cried, "and ye singin' in the choir-stall with the voice ye have, the way the Lord God 'ud be sharp at the lookin' down, and He settin' alone there in His wastes of heaven."

To much of this foolish but affectionate nonsense Patricia had to listen to in those years of her growing up, and only the innate balance of her mind enabled her to take it without spoiling. Spoilt she was and to a degree, but never in the sense of vanity. On that occasion when Mrs. Slattery had bound the coif and veil about her head, begging her to go and look at herself in the broken piece of mirror that clung between two nails to the kitchen wall, she had flung the garments from her, thrown the remaining handful of sugar into the saucepan boiling the piece of fish for the Friday's dinner, and fled out into the yard with a shout of laughter, like a bird screaming out of a cage.

Yet there were moments of falling from the height of her spirits, when she would think seriously of the prospect of life that was before her—moments when she might have been found, with her big eyes lost in the heart of a fire, or seated by that stream, a tributary of the Suir, that runs under Lowry's Bridge from its cradle in the hill of Croughaun.

What she was thinking of at times like these—a girl of sixteen, peeping, and no more, at womanhood—no pen, even were it dipped in her heart's blood, could write of. For the

mind of a girl with all its swiftness of development is more wrapped in the secret breast of mystery than the spark of life is hidden in the silent seed. Her thoughts are like butterflies, settling upon the flower of an idea, one minute come, another gone; taking nothing but the honey, it would seem, and yet, as sometimes might have been observed in Patricia's eyes, tasting the hidden savor of bitterness and trembling faintly in a sudden fear of life.

It was not long, however, these moods were lasting with her. Like the butterfly of her thoughts she would be off and away again into the zenith of her spirits, gone into the wild race of the wind, where not a hand could catch or tame her.

In such a mood, when it would have been as futile to turn the east wind into the west as to shake her from her purpose, she decided upon Josephine and herself going to their first dance.

The invitation had come from a house they knew well in Stradbally, a formal printed card, requesting the pleasure of the Misses Desmond's company, while written underneath was the amendment, *"Come along—the whole bang lot of you."*

This was ample invitation for Patricia, and sufficient inducement at the age of sixteen for her to decide on her hair going up on her head for the occasion.

"I'll not be seen," she cried, "with pigtails down me back, and I standin' stuck to the wall, the way I might root there for all the fellas would be askin' me to dance with 'em."

As may be supposed—for though with little resemblance, Cinderella, no less than this, is a true story—as may be supposed, both Sophie and Margaret had little sympathy with the troubles of their youngest sister, and discountenanced the proposition from the first moment they heard it.

"A child of sixteen!" they exclaimed; it was foolish enough her coming to the dance at all!

When discussions of this nature arose, there was always the ultimate tribunal of Mrs. Slattery in the kitchen, to which the offended party might appeal.

Under pain of deserving the reputation of cads, a term denoting all that was mean and despicable both in males and females, Patricia dragged them all into the kitchen, where for half an hour they sat on the tables, kicking their heels and chattering like magpies, so that in her judicial capacity Mrs. Slattery could not hear herself speak.

"Yirra, will ye whist, the whole lot of ye!" she cried at last, banging a saucepan down upon the table, and perspiring from every pore in her efforts to make herself heard.

They ceased their chatter at that and swung their legs in silence.

"Has Pat got e'er a dress at all she can go in?" asked Mrs. Slattery.

"None fit to be seen," declared Sophie and Margaret, who, with reputations to observe, were in hot defense of them.

"'Tis ten days from now," cried Pat in answer to this charge, "and if I can't vamp a thing will be better than that pink rag of Sophie's, or the green carry-me-out that Maggie's goin' to hang on herself, may I never be set to do me bit of dressmaking in the next world, for I'll be no good at it."

It was scarce likely that a verdict of any importance would be gained in that court; wherefore, when the evening fell, and upon Mrs. Slattery's recommendation, they all appeared before John Desmond in the dining-room. He sat there, pulling at his pipe and looking them up and down for all the world as if they were cattle, there for the express purpose of his inspection.

"Ye're a lot of cacklin' things," said he. "What the divvle's all this about?"

They told him, first one, then another, then all speaking together, their voices flocking like sheep, with the habit of women in a crowd. Pat only kept silent through it all, and, bringing his fist down upon the table to insure silence, it was to her John Desmond turned when the babel had ceased.

"What have ye got to say to all this blather, Pat?" he asked.

"There's a dance at Stradbally," said she, with a voice made quiet to be sure of itself, though none of them, least of all John Desmond, escaped that glitter of the eye—"there's a dance in Stradbally," said she, "and I'm goin' to it."

He leaned back in his chair and he laughed aloud at the simple deliberation of that. It was the way he would have conducted the business himself, letting men blow out their breath in fine talking and keeping the final word for the satisfaction of his own enjoyment. She was the very spit of himself, and like a man who knows no other feelings of paternity, he loved her for it.

"Well, what d'ye say to that, ye gabbling chatterboxes ye?" he cried in the midst of his laughter. "There's a dance in Stradbally, and Pat's damn well goin' to it."

"And I'm goin' with me hair up, if I have to walk the way of the roads in me stockin' vamps," said she.

"And she's going with her hair up," repeated John Desmond, coming now upon the enjoyment of it all. "She's goin' with her hair up, if she has to walk in her stockin' vamps to get there." He looked round at them all with the twinkle she had stolen out of his eyes. "Will ye tell me what ye make of that?" he asked, and his eye wandered slowly from one to the other.

They were all silent. It was only Mrs. Slattery, in the deep devotion of her nature, who came forward with a word to say, and she said it with a trembling lip, knowing how she would incur the displeasure of the creature she loved best amongst them all.

"If it's the way Pat's goin' into a convent," said she—"and shure, doesn't the worrld know there's all that honor for her —I'm thinkin' 'tis a queer thing for her, and she tastin' the diversions of life would be findin' the smack of it on her tongue the time she'd be puttin' the world away from her."

John Desmond turned and looked at his daughter, choosing for his own enlightenment that she should answer such a charge as that.

"If the taste's so sweet," said she, and as promptly as one who has thought the matter over in her mind, "isn't the world a better place for a woman to be livin' in than sayin' her prayers the way the Lord God would be tired listenin' to her? Wouldn't it be better so for a girl and she findin' the bitter taste it had, and she not frettin' her heart out the time she'd be countin' her beads and makin' her meditations with the lock on the door between her and the world outside? 'Tis goin' into a convent I am, shure don't I know that, and I wouldn't change places with one of ye. But I'll see what sort of a place the world is first, the way I'll be knowin' the thing I'm well quit of."

Here was talk, coming out of those hours of contemplation by the side of the stream or gazing into the heart of the fire —talk you may find in one amongst a thousand girls of sixteen, and then with all the wonder of an accident upon her lips.

She carried the day, as who could doubt it, and the next morning, having washed her hair, was to be seen in the park meadows on the best mare out of the stables, riding bare-

backed at the risk of her neck, and drying her black locks in the scud of the wind.

III

AN ENCOUNTER

THE road from Portlaw to Stradbally is through Carrel's Cross and Kilmacthomas. Except for the main highway between these two last-mentioned places, the one a mere site at the cross-roads for a lonely public-house, the other little more than a straggling village, it is an unwelcome road to travel on. In these days it was ill-metaled, and for all I know between Kilmacthomas and Stradbally may still run like waves of the sea in three beaten tracks with high ridges between—two for the wheels of the cart, and in the center that broader track where the hoofs of the toiling beasts, horses, donkeys, jennets, and mules, had beaten it down to the stony foundation of the road.

For the most part it wound its way across the cheerless land between loose stone walls, no more than three feet high, poor comfort in a driving wind. Seldom was the warmth of a leafy hedge to be enjoyed in that part of the world, and as for habitation, except here and there the deserted ruin of some wretched two-roomed cottage, falling to a skeleton by the roadside, there was scarce sight of man to be seen. Carrickbarrohane House seemed to be the only dwelling-place within miles.

Twelve miles it was from Portlaw to Stradbally as the crow flies, and by road must have been another two at least. Nevertheless, they set out from Waterpark that evening on the outside car, the four girls on either side and

Timothy Desmond on the box-seat, ready to do all that was asked of him.

With a shouting and a screaming they went off down the drive, the old conveyance lurching from one side of the road to the other like a ship taking heavy seas, and on the broken-down steps of the house stood Mrs. Slattery and John Desmond, both of them turning in memory to the days of their youth, both going back into the house as the car swayed out of sight, both putting out a hand to shut the hall-door, and both going to their separate rooms in silence.

It was turning to darkness as they came through the main street of Kilmacthomas, still shouting at the slightest provocation at the tops of their voices, Timothy whipping up the mare as they came into the street, for there is not an Irishman in the world who, as he enters a town or passes even so much as a row of cottages, will not give his beast the benefit of a show of its heels.

The sun had set over the hills of Drum beyond Dungarvan as they turned off the main road. Rents of orange light there were in the thunderous clouds of gray, and darkness was coming over the deep green fields with the strides of a giant hastening homewards.

The tediousness of the journey was now beginning to assert itself in the pace of the beast they were driving, but the prospect of the night's excitement before them kept up their spirits unabated. They were singing a song in time to the beat of the horse's hoofs, the girls with their treble and Timothy, all out of tune, with his youthful bass, when a voice lifted above theirs out of the gathering darkness and a black figure stepped out of the ditch by the side of the road.

Timothy pulled up in such a manner as flung them all forwards towards the shafts, and the old horse stood there panting in the darkness, glad of the unexpected rest.

"Is there anyone here knows anything about horses?" the man inquired as he approached the car. He raised his hat to the ladies, uncovering the black hair of Charles Stuart, not so curly as it was in his youth, but unmanageable still and dropping a twisted lock on his forehead.

"I'm sorry to stop you," he went on, "but I've got a beast here by the side of the road. She's in a bad way, I think, but I don't know much about 'em anyhow—enough to keep my seat in the saddle, that's all. And if any of you know anything about horses, I wish you'd have a look at her."

Timothy flung the reins to Sophie and jumped off the box. The next instant, Patricia was down on the ground by the side of him. Neither of them said a word, but went straight to that black mass lying palpitating on the stretch of grass by the side of the road.

"Shure, what does Pat think she's doin'?" exclaimed Sophie.

"Doesn't she know as much about horses as father?" retorted Josephine, swift in her defense.

"As much about fiddlesticks!" said Sophie.

Charles Stuart looked at them curiously, sitting there on that old shake-down of a car, with their ball-dresses peeping out in bright colors from under their heavy coats.

"Going to a dance?" said he.

"Stradbally," said Sophie—"the McNamaras'. Jinny's comin' out."

Jinny—as if the whole country, and this stranger into the bargain, knew the entire family from the eldest boy to the youngest girl!

"I've just come from Stradbally," said Charles, glancing across his shoulder at those two in the darkness bent over his heart-broken beast.

"What's happened ye at all, then?" inquired Sophie, anx-

ious to make acquaintance, quick to the romance of this odd encounter, as were the rest of them, one and all, though leaving it to Sophie, the eldest, to make her way with him.

"I've been riding from Waterford to Stradbally," said Charles, "with an hour and a half for my journey, and that's none too much for the beast I've got, with these roads under her feet."

He turned away to look at his horse and hear the verdict of these two young veterinaries, whose voices were now raised in heated argument by the side of the prostrate animal with her heaving flanks. So for the moment he left them seated on the car in the middle of the road, wondering who he might be and what had brought him in that pother from Waterford to Stradbally.

"He's not of these parts," whispered Sophie, and formed that judgment not only from his voice.

"He might be English and he speakin'," said Margaret.

" 'Tis a nice face he has," ventured Josephine, soft of heart already for romance.

They were sharp, those other two, in their abuse of her for that. What blather of nonsense, they said, for a girl of her age, and both knew the other was thinking the self-same thing by their abuse of her for uttering it.

Charles Stuart knew nothing of these whispered discussions upon himself as he stood listening to the altercation between Patricia and Timothy as to the immediate future of his wretched beast. There she lay in the wet grass, her head hanging down the slope towards the ditch, her eyes rolling, her nostrils distended as nothing but exhaustion could have stretched them. A thin stream of blood was trickling over her lips, and with every gasp she gave, the deep red drops were sprayed into the air.

"She's all right," said Timothy, getting up from his knees.

"I wouldn't say that she hadn't been ridden to the near end of her pitch, mind ye. But sure, if ye can get some straw and a blanket and keep her warm through the fall of the night, I'm not saying but what ye mightn' save her, the way she'd be doin' many a good day's work for ye yet. Shure, damn it, she's alive, isn't she, and there's always sinse in tryin' to save a beast if it's alive."

"A damn sight more," said Charles, "than trying to save her when she's not;" and in some despair he looked about him in the darkness for the sign of a light in a cottage window where straw might be had or a blanket or any warm covering at all.

Notwithstanding what had been said by Josephine on the car in defense of Patricia, he assumed that the boy was the only one of these two whose opinion in any sense was worth while; and, in the manner of those who have little dealing with animals, he felt the weight of responsibility heavy on his shoulders when he thought of himself trying to keep that poor beast alive through all the chilly hours of night till morning.

In despair he looked about him, but as for any sign of habitation there was none. And then, at that moment, when he was at the end of his wits, Patricia got up from her knees and stood out on the road with her father's heavy coat dragging to the ground, making a fine ungainly figure of the slim and pretty thing she was.

"If ye'd give me a pole-ax," said she in the hot temper that was on her for that suffering poor creature on the ground—"if ye'd give me a pole-ax, I'd do what ought to be done to that wretched beast to put her out of her torments."

He might have laughed at the thought of a child of that age swinging a pole-ax in the little hands he saw peeping

out of the sleeves of the big coat—for that matter, they might all have laughed—but it was the true metal in her voice that made Charles Stuart look at her with interest, and kept the others silent as they sat there on the car.

"Do you mean she can't possibly live?" asked Charles.

"Could you have lived as long?" retorted Patricia, and in a fine contempt of him for his treatment—"Could you have lived as long if a man the size of yeerself had whipped and spurred ye from Stradbally to Waterford?"

Her ears evidently had been quick enough to hear what he had said to them sitting on the car, as well as attend with every other sense in her body to the matter in hand.

Charles Stuart flushed hot under his brown skin, for she had a whip in her voice, and could use it to advantage, too.

"Some journeys have to be taken," said he, and now well-nigh as hot in his voice as she. "When it's the life of a man against a beast, you can leave it to sentimentalists to choose the beast."

Here they were at words, and in the first five minutes of an acquaintance. But she had the last of it.

"Well, if there's a man here," said she—and meaning Timothy no less than him—"he'll put that poor thing out of her misery, and he with no more sparing talk in him of savin' her for a day's work after what she's done this night."

Charles Stuart looked at her eyes, blazing there even in that darkness, and then, without another word, he snatched the pistol out of his pocket, and, putting it to the forehead of the panting beast, he settled the matter without pole-ax or any more talk about it at all.

She might have thanked him, since that at least was what she had asked for, but with no more than one look at the horse to see that it was dead, she climbed back to her seat on

the car, which, as she had been sitting, offered him nothing further than the expressive silence of her back.

It was Timothy, now deeply impressed by the use of the firearm, and wondering greatly who it could be riding his horse to death on the Stradbally road with pistols in his pocket, who asked him what the hell he was going to do to get himself back to Waterford.

" 'Tis a good three miles to Kilmacthomas," said he, "and I dunno will ye get a car there at all would take ye all the ways into Waterford. There's the post-car would take ye in for two shillin's, but shure we met that and well on its way near by Carrel's Cross."

"It's past whistling for, then," said Charles.

"It is," said he, and quite seriously.

"Well, I must take to my feet—that's all," declared Charles. " 'Tis better than a stretcher."

"Shure, he can't walk all these ways of the road," whispered Josephine; and they were all agreed upon that, who, whenever they had so much as a mile before them, would fling their weight on the back of a horse.

"Wouldn't ye come on with us to the dance?" exclaimed Sophie suddenly. "There'll be people from Waterford are there, and they takin' ye back in the break of the mornin'."

With the exception of Patricia, who, if she was thinking of anything, had got her mind on that dead beast by the side of the road, they all cried out in a chorus for his coming.

"Ah, do!" they shouted, and there he stood down in the road, laughing at the lot of them.

"What? In these things?" said he, "and the mud splashed up to the collar round my neck?"

"Shure, ye can get a wash," said Josephine. " 'Tis a house we're going to."

"But, good heavens!" he objected, "I don't know your host and I don't know whether he'd care to know me."

"Is it Michael McNamara not know annywan would be ridin' their beast to her last gasp and they with pistols in their pockets? Shure, 'twould worry him to death if he thought we'd left ye out here on the road and he not knowin' who the devil ye were."

Truly Timothy had about the size of their host when he said that, and, indeed, expressed the true spirit of curiosity in the whole of his race. One and all they were burning in the oil of their own inquisitiveness, and held their breath after this speech of Timothy's in the hope that Charles would tell them who he was.

"Well, will you take the responsibility?" said he, inclining, as it could easily be seen, to this fantastic proposition, as one who never had the heart to let adventure slip out of his hands.

"Oh, shure we'll take that all right!" cried Sophie, spokesman for the rest, even the silent Patricia, sitting there with the collar of her father's coat turned up around her head and still offering her back to them all. "Jump up here! Ye can sit on the well of the car, the way yeer legs'll be hangin' down at the back and we comin' in, the six of us, will make a great stir in Micky's house this night."

He stepped forward to the car to do as he was bid, and then stood still in the middle of the road looking up at them.

"And don't any of you want to know who I am?" he asked, with a twinkle of laughter in his eyes and his lips taking the curve of a wry smile.

"Oh, we do, of course!" they shouted in a quick chorus, and even Patricia, keeping her silence, just turned her head like a deer listening on the fringe of the herd.

"Well, Charles Stuart's my name," said he.

"Charles Stuart," whispered someone in that darkness; at which he jumped up into the well of the car, and as they set off in the still gathering darkness, Patricia, fresh from her schooling, was taking her mind back to the bonny Prince of that name, and weaving a romance, despite herself.

IV

CARRICKBARROHANE HOUSE

THE house of Carrickbarrohane, where in those days lived Michael McNamara—known as Micky the whole county round—stood well back from the road, some two miles outside Stradbally, in parkland of its own.

The salt winds off the sea had left their imprint upon all the vegetation about it. Stunted hawthorns with twisted trunks were bent inland, some blown back like the hair on the head of a woman that is shaken out in the scuffle of the wind.

It is a black part of the world even now, for the storms that fret the Channel sea are born out of the deep womb of the wide Atlantic and come recklessly to shore, like the children of giants, bent upon willful destruction.

Even were there the heart for it, there is little purpose in the protection of property on that coast. The sea is forever creeping into the estate of the land, poaching a piece of pasture here, there, stealing a poor field of corn from under the farmer's very eyes. For some miles inland it takes its perquisites, after the fashion of those who steal, small petty thefts, when there are no eyes about.

Carrickbarrohane House was protected in no little degree by giant elms that stood like dogs, guarding it from the sea

winds, yet in its normal aspect and in its tones of chilly gray behind the black trees had no great air of comfort, but rather the suggestion of one shivering in a dismal shelter, with shoulders nipped and narrowed in the cold.

On that night, however, it wore a look of unaccustomed gayety, with bright lights in all the windows, and Chinese lanterns dangling from the lower branches of the trees. There was the sound of laughter, of music, and the stir of people that came like a murmur in the wind across the wide grass-land as soon as ever you entered the drive. Outside cars and inside cars, vehicles no coach-builder had ever made before or will make again, were coming and going in characteristic confusion, the voices of the drivers lifted in such tempestuous altercation, struggling for entrance and exit, as seemed to suggest that at any moment there might be a slitting of throats.

Many an outside car making its way up the drive that night was laden no less than that which came from Waterpark. Many an inside car, filled to overflowing, disgorged its crowded occupants once the house was in sight.

Jinny McNamara was coming out to a fair company, drawn mostly from Dungarvan, who had driven long miles over the rutted roads; and scarce a dozen in the whole gathering had even seen Jinny in their lives before.

As soon as they entered the drive, Charles Stuart slipped off the seat on the well and walked beside the car as it mounted the gradual ascent to the house.

This was odd adventure to him who had trafficked in none but the sterner issues of life, where men are dodging danger, and with nothing more between them and death than a quick eye and the nimbleness of their wits. Beside the events of his life in Mexico, this was adventure domesticated and tame, yet possessing an element he had never encountered

before, the element of sex, having but little place in the mind of a man who is living from day to day by the strength of his wrist and the clean, quick vision of his eye.

There on that car beside which he walked, were four creatures, strangers to him less than an hour before, who, even in that darkness and for all he knew because of it, suggested that first, new, strange movement in his pulses by which the young man knows he is coming upon the mystery of life.

Up the long stretch of that drive he found himself eager for the lights of the house to show him the features of that strange little company who had helped him out of his dilemma, and but for whom he might still have been sitting by the side of that poor beast with its broken wind, on a far road miles from sign of habitation.

Over the remainder of the drive he had learnt their names, all introduced by Sophie, and all, except Patricia, making some rejoinder to his salute, if it were no more than a girlish giggle. With Timothy it took the form of whipping up the old mare till the wheels were rattling and bumping beneath them.

He gathered that they came from Portlaw. He understood the name of their house was Waterpark, and from Timothy that it would be the hell of a fine place with a bit of money spent upon it. But beyond this they were still strangers to him in the blackness of that night, no less than he to them, and when they reached the open hall-door, through which the first light they had seen other than the lamps of the car was flooding out on to the drive, they had whipped off their seats and were gone up the stairs into the hall before he had time so much as to catch a glimpse at them.

"Let ye wait there the time I'd be goin' round to the stables," shouted Timothy; and before he could expostulate

or propose that he might come as well, the young devil had whipped up the mare, who, relieved of her load, bounded into the darkness of the trees and was gone. Charles Stuart found himself standing on the steps of a strange house in all that coming and going and shouts of welcome—standing there, and alone.

In this predicament, he was not left long in doubt. Across the hall and out on to the steps there came a man about fifty years of age, as florid in countenance as he was in speech.

"Where's the fella?" he said in a loud voice—"where's the fella had to shoot his horse? They told me his name, but I'm damned it I can remember it. Where is he?"

Charles came forward.

"Stuart's my name," said he.

"Ah! Stuart! It is, of course. There's a sieve of a memory for ye, an' they tellin' me two minutes gone. I'm damned glad to meet ye—I am indeed! Ye must have had the hell of a ride. Come upstairs, man—shure, come upstairs. I've got the tail of a coat and a shirt I can lend ye, and a pair of slippers too, the way ye can be hoppin' it with the best of them. Will ye have a drink now, or will ye come and change first? Ah! come and have a drink—or I'll have it sent up to the room, whichever ye like. Shure, the place is yeer own; ye've only got to ring a bell—if it'll ring—and tell the servant what ye want, if there's a servant at all would be comin' to ye in all this shemozzle."

He waited for no answer, and scarcely waited for breath to speak. A man who has had to ride his horse to death and then shoot it on the roadside with a pistol all ready for the business in his pocket is on the fair way to being somewhat of a hero in a house like that. Micky—since none knew him by any other name—could have been no prouder had he been

welcoming royalty to his doors. The best he had was placed at Charles' disposal, and half an hour later he came down into the room where they were all dancing—a-stamping and a merry mass of them—with Micky's tail of a coat on his back, whom none would have recognized from that dark figure stepping out of the hedge on the Stradbally road.

It would go hard, however, with women if they had no more than their eyesight to be trusting to. Sophie's instinct picked him out sure enough, the moment he entered the room, and in the space of an instant had gone up and introduced herself again.

Charles looked his astonishment, and mingled with no little admiration too. There was not a girl in the whole room within sight who could match her for the beauty she had. If from her father she had borrowed the greater part of her spirit, there at least was the gentleness of her mother looking out of her soft brown eyes; and that dainty curve of the upper lip to which John Desmond had fallen so willing a victim in his youth made all the full value of its impression upon Charles Stuart as he stood looking down at her.

It was a dance he wanted at once, and not one or two, but three if she would give them. She doled them out, with as tantalizing a grace as you might have expected from one of that family. For with all the big spirit of John Desmond and all the tender gentleness of his wife, between them both they had bred coquettes, these two. Even Margaret and Josephine, they were flirts, the pair of them, in their more timid way.

She pointed them out to him, surrounded by the black coats, but with eyes casting in quick glances to see what their sister was up to with their hero of a noisy hour.

"And which is Patricia?" he asked.

"Oh, shure, she's the kid," replied Sophie—"This is her

first dance. She'll be pinning herself together upstairs. 'Tis the way girls always do that when they come to their first dance."

"Why their first?" said he.

She looked up at him with a twinkle that was her father's in her mother's brown eyes—" 'Tis when they get experience," said she, "they wouldn't mind if their clothes were dropping off them, so long as they had a good pick of the men." She raised herself on tiptoe, so that her mouth came nearer to his ear. "She's made her own frock," she whispered, "and she thinkin' when she tried it on at home it was the most beautiful thing in the world. And now she's here with all the others 'tis a rag she's callin' it, and she upstairs with her mouth full of pins."

How was he to recognize the small, still voice of jealousy whispering there? Sophie's ears had been quick to hear that outburst of Patricia's on the Stradbally road, and, quicker than his, had caught the ready reaction of it in his reply. In that moment she might even have wished that the higher flights of Patricia's spirits were her own. But opportunity is a wide arena in which a woman may use all the weapons that she has. Sophie was now using hers, and with such effect that Patricia, with all her talk of pole-axes and the flame he had seen at that moment in her eyes, slipped gently from his memory to the persuading wiles of this girl, with all her beauty, at his side.

From Margaret and from Josephine he took his dances too, but none so many as he asked of Sophie.

After the third extra, and when the dance was at last to begin, he was dragged away by Micky, his host, into the dining-room, stripped of all its furniture, with the exception of the table that groaned beneath the weight of the dishes piled upon it.

"There won't be much of that left," said Micky, "the time it'll be strikin' the twelve o'clock."

It was a Friday night, most popular in all the week for a dance. They came there hungry and thirsty with their fasting, and at twelve o'clock was it not Saturday morning, when who was there to raise a forbidding hand?

One drink after another the genial host consumed and plied his guest with, while his curiosity bubbled and boiled within him to find out what had been that business on the Stradbally road that called for a horse dead-beat and a pistol ready in the pocket.

"Ye don't carry a shooter as a rule, do ye?" he asked.

"I've been out in Mexico," said Charles cautiously. "You can't walk about there in broad daylight without one."

"In Mexico!" said Micky. "Well, fancy that now! 'Tis a long way off." And was indeed a long way off to him, who had never been further than Waterford in his life.

When at last it dawned upon him that he was leaving his guests, he gave up the pursuit of curiosity for the time, and brought Charles back to the dancing-room.

"Is there anybody ye want to be introduced to?" said he. "Shure, they'd all dance with ye if they could. Is there anybody at all?" He was looking round the room for his own partner as he talked, and neither knew what it was he was saying nor who his partner might be. "Shure, I'll shout out yeer name," he went on with a preoccupied laugh, "and I'll introduce ye to the lot, then ye can pick and choose as ye like."

"For God's sake don't do that!" exclaimed Charles, with the blood hot to his face at the thought of it; and as much in self-defense as anything else, he requested introduction to a girl standing alone by the furthest window in the room.

"I dunno who she is, mind ye," said Micky as he led

him down the room; "but, faith, I'll mumble something, and, by God! if ye've been in Mexico, ye can do the rest for yeerself."

He mumbled the travesty of a name into the thickness of his mustache, and then he left them. The girl put out her arm like one humbled by the inevitable, and he swung her out into the crowd.

V

THE DANCE AT STRADBALLY

THAT nimbleness of feet which will save many a man in an awkward corner goes but a short way towards making a dancer of him. Charles Stuart was quick and dainty enough on his feet when sterner occasions demanded it, but in the service of a gentle art they were no more than impediments to his progress. He knew he was no dancer, and yet it came to him with no little surprise when his partner exclaimed:

"Oh, what's the good of pretendin' ye can dance when ye can't? Shure, let's go and sit down."

He obeyed at once, with the thought shadowing across his mind that this was the second time that night he had been spoken to in such manner by a strip of a girl. It brought back a picture of Patricia, standing out there on the Stradbally road in her father's overcoat, talking of pole-axes, and requesting one or the other of them to prove himself a man. As he walked with his partner out into the garden, he found himself wondering when he should see her, and how long she would be engaged upstairs with her home-made garments, in that agony of making things do.

There were long walks under the trees in that garden, where a discriminate dotting of Chinese lanterns pointed out lonely paths and revealed seats in the bushes where it was possible to sit with features well in shadow, almost unobserved.

With an interest she had stirred in him by reason of that candid criticism of his dancing, Charles led his partner to one of these places of seclusion, little dreaming it was the unhesitating assurance of her footsteps that had shown him the way.

He had watched her face in the lights of the room, and though there was none of that beauty he had seen in the features of Sophie Desmond, there was no little of charm and enough of character to bring a welcome interest to this alternative, caring as little for dancing as he did. Her eyes were almost black, so deep a blue they were, and to a young man of his impressionable nature, with little, if any, experience of women at all, he was as like to be caught in a net of beauty as by the more subtle attractions this girl held out to him, with the expressive vitality in her face and that quickness of tongue she had in the velvet brogue of her voice.

You, who have guessed already it was none other than Patricia herself, may well excuse him that under the deceptive conditions of that unexpected adventure, he never dreamed the possibility of such a reëncounter. From her father's overcoat and with a shawl over her head to that gossamer garment of white was too great a transformation for his mind to grapple with. He was picturing her upstairs in that room, a vain young monkey with tears of chagrin in her eyes and her mouth full of pins, little thinking she would be down and about her own business in the dancing-room so soon, little imagining that, with a true

instinct, a woman needs little of experience to teach her what is the thing to do.

His mind, indeed, was running on Patricia as they sat down in their secluded corner, and it was little wonder that his first words were indirectly of her.

"Have you seen the Desmonds here tonight?" he asked her, thinking, with a smile in his mind, how swiftly a man may drop into the social tricks and guiles when once he is in that artificial atmosphere. She could little guess, he thought, the curiosity that was in his mind about them.

"I have," said she at once. "They came the same time as I did."

"Are there more than the four girls who are here tonight?" he inquired.

"There are not," said she. "Isn't four enough—of wild creatures the like of them?"

"Do you know them well?"

"I do indeed."

"The eldest one—Sophie—she's a very pretty girl, isn't she?"

"She would be if she didn't know it," said Patricia, tempted to the thrust, and making it without hesitation in return for the many blows she had never revenged herself upon.

Charles smiled in the darkness, receiving that sudden insight into Sophie's character which, despite his admiration and against his will, robbed him of some of the glamour his imagination had already clothed her in. What is more, as though a clearer vision in that moment had come to him, he realized the little stab of jealousy in her confidence about Patricia. What was there about the child for Sophie, with her fascinations, to be jealous of? He pursued his inquiries with all the eager interest of one following a trail. Here

was the same thrill of romance stirring in his pulses, the same impulse for discovery and adventure as had dragged him from his office stool so many years before.

"How about the youngest, Patricia?" he asked then. "This is her first dance, isn't it?"

"How did you know that?"

"Her sister Sophie told me so. The poor child, apparently, is upstairs, wrestling with a frock she made herself, afraid to come downstairs and show it."

"Did Sophie tell ye that?"

A quicker ear than his would have detected the sharp note in her voice. His were better tuned to watches by night, when the splashing of the water against the sides of a ship but added to the somewhat somnolent monotony of silence. Sophie was his informant, he admitted, and learned nothing of that moment from which her whole manner changed.

"Are ye dancing with Sophie?" she asked.

"Next dance," said he.

She nodded her head, and asked him what it was he wanted to know of Patricia.

"She's a wild young cat," she added. "Did ye ever speak to her at all?"

With no attempt at concealment regarding himself, he told her of the incidents of that evening on the Stradbally road, and how he had made the acquaintance of the entire Desmond family in the space of a strange five minutes.

"She stood out there in the road," said he, now speaking of Patricia again, "and I'm hanged if she didn't make me shoot that horse, when the boy, who must have three or four years ahead of her, was all for saving its life."

"What a fool ye were to be listenin' to a little girl," said she, "has no more sinse to her than to be frettin' her heart

out over an old rag she'd be wearin' at a dance!" And whether he saw it or not, there was no keeping the wink of laughter out of her eyes as she spoke.

For a while he sat there wondering was he a fool or not, and coming to the conclusion—as there is little doubt she meant him to—that perhaps, after all, Sophie, with her description of that mouthful of pins, had grossly misrepresented Patricia.

"I don't know that I was," said he at last, and in almost a childlike simplicity. "She gave me the impression that she knew what she was talking about—a good deal more than the boy did. I don't think I was such a fool, after all. I could see she knew something about horses by the way she handled the beast. And, by Jove! she's got a tongue in her head."

"She has that," said Patricia.

"I wouldn't care to fall foul of it," said he.

"Ye would not," she replied.

He looked out into the darkness towards the lights of the house, wondering, and aloud, if it were time for the next dance.

"There's plenty of time," said she; "and if it's Sophie ye're wanting, shure, she'll wait for ye all right. 'Tis a great catch ye are tonight with a horse was droppin' under ye on the road, and ye shootin' it with a pistol ye had in yeer pocket. There's plenty of time, and if 'tis interested in Patricia ye are, ye can stop and talk to me."

"What made you think I was interested in her?" he asked, for suddenly it had come to his realization that he was. The recounting of that incident on the Stradbally road had made the vivid personality of her stand out in a fresh light. The realization that it was nothing more than

jealousy in Sophie's remarks about her sister had quickened his thoughts of Patricia and excited his curiosity to see her when at length she did come downstairs.

"What made you think I was interested?" he repeated.

"Oh, shure, I dunno. Didn't I say she was a queer little cat?"

"Is she pretty?" he inquired.

"She's what ye'll find her," said Patricia, speaking, and in all unconsciousness, a truer criticism of those deep blue eyes and that odd length of upper lip than she could have given of herself in a whole year of considered thought.

The charm of Patricia, indeed, lay no little in the minds of those who found it. John Desmond, even in his youth, had been no engaging man to look at, yet women had fallen victims to the charm of him wherever he had gone. Patricia had taken all that and more as her dowry, and when Mrs. Slattery had cried out in her ecstasy what a beautiful nun she would make, it was because in her doting eyes the child had all the beauty that a woman needs.

"It's up to me, then," said Charles, with a laugh—"it's up to me to find her pretty."

" 'Tis not much good for ye if ye do," said Patricia, and with a smack of her tongue as though she relished the saying of it. " 'Twill be little good to ye, for she's goin' into a convent when she's eighteen by the clock."

Charles looked down at her sitting there beside him, and his mouth was agape in his surprise. That child, who had stood out there in all her defiance, with character snapping in every word she spoke—that child going to seclude herself in a convent! His interest had been aroused before, now it leapt in his heart and sped tingling, in some sense of antagonism, through every drop of blood in his veins.

VI

THE MOUNTAIN SWIRL

ON their return to the house she left him to make the discovery for himself that he had missed his dance with Sophie. A highly incensed young woman regarded him with accusing eyes as she swept by on the arm of a more fortunate substitute. There was no temporizing about Sophie, as he had been given to suppose. The moment he saw her, dancing there, he knew the enormity of what he had done, and felt far more apprehensive of those glances she shot at him than of any shower of bullets or the swift malevolence of steel.

At the first opportunity he found her when that dance was over, making his apologies with hot cheeks and a stammering tongue. The excuse that the garden was too far from the house to hear the music of that string band, hired out of Dungarvan—for God knows it is more upon instruments of brass they are accustomed to play with any effect in that town—had little, if any, weight with her. He should not have been out in the garden at all with so solemn an engagement falling due, and in so short a time. "And certainly not," said she in a crescendo, "wasting yeer time with a child like that."

He had an excuse for this, such as it was worth. He declared he did not know the child from Adam.

"I don't care," said she, "if ye didn't know her from Eve, and 'tis hard to understand why ye wouldn't with the cheek of her there on the road, tellin' ye to kill yeer horse, and Timothy after saying it was all right."

"Patricia!" he muttered.

"Shure, who else?" said she.

He burnt red over his brown skin as he walked away, and as he cooled his cheeks in the chill air of that garden, came, with his spirit for adventure, upon a plan to be even in the score she had made against him.

In the time that three dances were to have gone by she was to be there at that garden-seat to meet him again. Encumbered with no further contracts until then, he went straightway to the place and sat down, determined that no other couple should forestall them.

What impression such a clandestine assignation as this may give to those having in their mind the proper conduct in a ball-room, there is no purpose, and certainly no time, to consider here. A country dance in Ireland is no formal matter, with proprieties to be observed. Driving as many as thirty miles to a dance in that outside car, those girls of John Desmond's had often slept the few remaining hours of the night in some barn attached to the house and wrapped in horse blankets, till they set back on the journey home next day.

It was nothing, with those sudden and ephemeral attachments that grew like mushrooms in a ball-room, for a girl to dance ten times in an evening with the man who was to her liking. For the benefit of a watchful mother's eyes at home—for who thought of chaperones?—she might fill up her program with countless names, and make her engagements with them, too. But for five or six dances in succession you might find her in some secluded corner, deaf to the sounds of polka following waltz or the lancers coming after.

"If I secure the place," Charles had said, "will you be here?"

And though she had demurred—for what woman's con-

sent is worth the while if given freely?—at last she agreed, and gave her promise to come back again.

There he sat, then, in that corner, whilst one couple after another glowered at him as they passed by; there he sat, listening to the distant thump of feet on the bare floor and the faint strains of that string band, until other sounds less loud, yet further-reaching in the anticipation of his mind, came to his hearing. He sat upright. There was no mistaking it; the tapping of high heels on the gravel path. His heart was hammering underneath that borrowed shirt as it had never beat in all the wildest moments of his life in Mexico. Across his mind it flashed then as a stray thought will—Is there ever such a thrilling adventure in life as when the hunter's horn first sounds through the heart of a man, and out of the tangle of the days a woman starts and lifts in him the eager cry of pursuit?

In such a mind, though never expressed in words in that speeding thought, he sat listening, till her white frock came out of the shadows, and he was standing to his feet, knowing she was there.

"I've kept the seat," said he awkwardly.

"I saw ye sittin' here two dances back," she replied, and sat herself down.

Whether she meant that to disconcert him or not, it did. He took the other corner of the seat, and for a while said nothing, merely watching her, while words made tumbling pyramids in his brain and never reached the apex of the most common form of sense.

Instinctively, he made comparisons with these features of hers and that undeniable beauty of her sister Sophie, when, against all apparent reason, Sophie came forth the loser every time. Sophie's hair had an uncertain tone of brown, while here was a raven black; her lips were made for quickly for-

gotten kisses, here were lips that would never forget; her eyes were swift for the admiring glance, here were eyes that looked straight and far whether they were conscious or not of the distance in which they saw. It was character, and at every turn, that won the verdict in her favor from his thoughts.

For the first time in his life, he knew then why men of the foulest breed would drop their voices to a reverent note when they spoke of a woman keeping some hearthstone for them across the wide acres of the seas. Such a woman Charles felt this child would grow to be, and leapt from one impression of her to another, as a man takes the stepping bowlders across a mountain swirl. It needed a false step only for the whole of his nature to be immersed. Yet from one to another he sprang, laughing in his heart, keen in the joy of the excitement it was, and never stopping in the balance to think of the depth of the torrent at his feet.

"Did ye have yeer dance with Sophie?" she asked presently, for silence was not a thing she would tolerate for long.

"No," said he, and smiled with his reply; "I missed it. We sat out here two dances last time. Her dance was nearly finished when I got into the room."

"She liked ye for that," said Patricia.

"Yes—and you told me she wouldn't mind."

"I didn't want ye to be frettin' yeerself," said she. "I knew ye'd be in for it when I heard the band start up."

"You heard it begin and you never told me? You let me sit here for another five minutes or more?"

"I did," said she.

"Well, why did you do that?"

"To get back on her for what she said about Pat. Shure, the poor child couldn't help the way her dress was. Didn't

she have to make it herself, without the help of a finger from one of them?"

He laughed at her honest spirit of revenge.

"You seem to know a lot about Pat," said he, and kept the meaning out of his voice as well as he could.

"I do," said she quickly—"shure, I know her as well as anyone is here tonight."

But it was evident she had taken some fright at his word, for she was quick to ask him had he seen Patricia yet.

He confessed, with an assumption of disappointment that evidently convinced her, he had not; for her courage rose again, and she sat there laughing quietly in her corner of the seat.

"D'ye think ye'll recognize her," she asked presently, "when ye'd be seein' her again?"

"I'm sure I should," he declared.

She laughed still more at that, telling him it must have been a deep impression the child had made on him when she called out on that Stradbally road for him to be a man.

What spirit of adventure it was came into the mind of Charles Stuart then, he could not have said. There was a high bowlder before him in the mountain race, and whether or no it were out of the path which he pursued, almost before he knew the thing he did, he had leapt and landed there.

"It was a deep impression," said he; "I don't think I shall ever forget it. It's funny of me, I know, to be talking like this to you, for, after all, we're strangers. Why, I don't even know your name! Even Mr. McNamara didn't know it when he introduced us, but somehow or other I feel I can tell you things."

He was more in earnest, without knowing it, though part it was in a sudden sense of jest, to pay her out for the

trick she had played on him. And she sat there listening—sat there in her home-made frock, with her heart quite still and her mind creeping back to those moments by the stream, that tumbles down from the hill of Croughan. For something there was in that moment then, making an echo to these dreams of hers—the butterflies in the mind of a girl that take their sweetness from a sudden thought and sometimes touch the bitterness as well.

"Tell me what things," she asked him under her breath.

And now he caught the fear from her, and felt his feet were slipping from the rock.

"Oh, all—all sorts of things," said he, an effort far too late to save himself; for as he glanced across the darkness at her there, and thought of the fate in store for her, he slipped from that foothold and he fell. There was the water high about his throat, and he was deep in love.

VII

A TAILPIECE

IT would be hard to tell in any fairy tale by whom the prince is made aware of that princess suffering under the sorcerer's spell. He sets out upon his adventures, knowing little of East from West, so long as one or the other of them bring him into the heart of life. There is no certain goal he makes for, no definite treasure he seeks. For life and the hot breath of it is all he asks. The whole world is full of princesses imprisoned in some fatal shape a sorcerer's spell has cast upon them, but he goes forth with no conscious purpose to set a single one of them free.

There are princesses turned into swans, into timid deer;

there are princesses bemoaning their lot in the vile shape of toads and reptiles that crawl upon the earth, needing only that ring of his all-conquering sword and the fearless courage of his eye to transform them into the gentle beauty of themselves. How many thousands of princesses there are needing only the love out of the heart of a prince to bring the revelation of their beauty, he knows full well. Still, it is neither treasure nor princess he seeks that day he sets out from his father's kingdom.

Yet through the stress of flames in that furnace of life, without one to guide his footsteps to her side, surely he comes upon some princess in her plight. That is the ultimate direction in all fairy tales; that is the ultimate direction in all journeys under the sun.

Breaking away from the bondage of his father's control, Charles Stuart had gone to the uttermost ends of the earth in search of the adventure of life, and only when coming back to the very threshold of his father's door again had he found that for which all princes make their voyage of discovery; only then had he found the princess, almost in the very moment of closing her eyes in the endless sleep of her enchantment.

For this is the greatest adventure of all. A man may fight and a man may kill; he may journey into the wild stretches of unknown continents, beating his way through nature to some little or some glorious end, but that hour when he falls in love is greater than a hundred years of danger. Not only does the heart beat quicker then, the pulse dilate, and all the energies in his veins swell like the sap that rises in the budding tree, but then it is he stretches beyond the reach of the vigorous power of his arm and touches in an ecstasy he will never know again the fringe of the very garments of God.

BOOK VI

THE SORCERY OF FATE

"There was not one in all the kingdom could break the spell."

Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales.

I

AN AFFAIR WITH MRS. SLATTERY

ON that evening when their little party had started for Stradbally and the two remaining occupants of Waterpark had each lent a hand to the shutting of the hall-door, Mrs. Slattery went back again to her kitchen and John Desmond to the solitude of his dining-room, like an old hound to his kennel after the huntsmen have left the stable yard.

With her pots and her saucepans over the kitchen fire, performing those duties which earn no thanks yet must nevertheless be done, the good woman was fretting her heart to think of him there alone, robbed of the company of his Patricia.

"Shure, I'd go and talk wid him meself," said she, in the habit of most women who speak their thoughts aloud when they can be as ungrammatical as they like and stand in no prospect of needless interruption—"I'd go and talk wid him meself, if a' be I thought I could say anything to him at all. But what could an old cook in a kitchen be sayin' to a gintleman like himself, an' she talkin' of the bit of a pig's cheek boiled wid cabbage he might be puttin' in his stomach for tomorrow's dinner?"

Nevertheless she went timidly to the dining-room, with the ostensible purpose of pulling the curtains as it fell dark, though expressly with the intention in her mind of seeing what way he was passing the time on his hands.

He had lit the fire, though it was in the wane of April, and stretched out in his armchair before it, was sitting there staring into the flames, while open and discarded on the table beside him, lay a copy of Moore's "Irish Melodies."

Though she could not have distinguished the difference between a Bible and a cookery book, it was this volume she guessed it must be. Never had she known him to read any other, and only this when the deepest bitterness was upon his soul.

In the worst phase of these depressions, if there were anyone by he would read out the book aloud, with no variety in his intonations, but like a child, having learned the thing by heart.

Mrs. Slattery saw the volume on the table and made no comment. In silence she pulled the curtains, in silence she was about to leave the room, when his hand stretched out for the book lying open on the table and she drew her breath in a heavy sigh.

"This fella," said he, turning over the pages—"this fella was the divvle of a wan for snatchin' up a song. 'Twas himself could make a po'm on a bit of a straw stickin' out of a thatch so long as it was in this God-forsaken country."

Having found the page he wanted, he turned to her then, putting the question he invariably asked her on these sorry occasions:

"Mrs. Slattery, did ye ever read these things at all?"

"I did not," said she, as was her custom, too; for she could read no word in any form, and well he knew it, though it never seemed to occur to his mind at such a time.

"Well, ye ought to," said he, " 'twill improve yeer mind, and, by God, it'll make ye as miserable as ye could ever want to be in yeer life. Just take a listen to this:

"'Oh! think not my spirits are always as light,
And as free from a pang as they seem to ye now,
Nor expect that the heart-beaming smile of tonight
Will return with tomorrow to brighten my brow.'

"Shure, glory be to God," he went on, looking up when he had read so far, "wouldn't it make ye feel as if ye were walkin' through a graveyard to a weddin' and ye readin' that? And 'tis damned good stuff, mind ye. Shure, 'tis the very words I'd write meself if I was a po't, which thanks be to God I'm not. Shure, I could read ye lashin's of the same sort of it out of this very book."

However, part of one stanza apparently was enough for her. The sympathetic creature went out of the room without waiting to hear more. She knew what would do him more good than all the melodies in the whole of Ireland, and straightway she proceeded to the kitchen to get it.

For ten whole years John Desmond had kept his pledge with Father Casey, and though Mrs. Slattery knew nothing of his bargain with the Lord God, a thousand times she had rejoiced in the silence of her heart when she observed the temperance that had come over him. Never since that night when she had dropped the tray of whisky on the floor had she attempted to set the temptation before him again. Something, she knew, and of a serious nature, must have persuaded him to this total abstinence; moreover, in fear that explanation might cause him to think folly of his ways, she had never inquired what it was.

But ten years was a lifetime, and surely, she persuaded herself, the weakness must have gone from him then. In any case the thought of him sitting there alone and reading those verses to himself was more than that large heart in her ample bosom could bear to contemplate. In ten minutes she was back at the dining-room door with the punchbowl

and ladle, the lemon and whisky all heaped up on the tray in her hands.

As she appeared in the doorway with a look saying, as plain upon her face, "Shure, I know what ye want," the eyes of John Desmond lifted from the flames of the fire and rested on the burden in her hands.

She was about to put the tray down upon the table, when the expression on his face arrested the slightest movement in her body. Never in all his rages—and they had been many—had he ever struck her in his life; but she made sure he was about to do it then, and in the sudden knowledge of the temptation it still was in his mind, she would have suffered the blow without a word.

"Did I ring the bell?" said he, and in a voice that traveled through her veins in a sickening vibration of fear.

"Ye did not," said she, trembling.

"Then what in the name of God have ye got there?" he demanded—"and ye holdin' it as if it were a bottle of baby's milk. D'ye want to be thrown out of this house for tamperin' with the drink!" cried he. "For 'tis goin' the right way ye are to get it. D'ye want me to give ye a month's wages before they're due, which is a thing I never did to any servant in me life?"

"I do not," she whispered.

"Then take that damned stuff," said he, "and niver let me see it inside the walls of this room again."

Without so much as resting the tray on the corner of the table, she turned and went out of the open door; and not until she had set it down again in the kitchen did she give way to the agony of her shame and disappointment.

"Niver in all me life!" were the first coherent words she spoke, and all the rest of the thousand things she said were lost in the violent passion of her sobbing.

Some drastic issue was bound to come out of this, for when once a woman starts crying because she cannot help it—and that is not so very often the case—tears seem to accumulate as much as to flow. By the time she has worked herself into a tempest of passionate revolt, the flood-gates of restraint are burst with the weight of that reservoir of tears, and she is beating at the gates of justice in her hunger to be avenged.

In ten minutes, Mrs. Slattery was back again at the dining-room door, with the tears still wet in a broad smudge on her cheeks and her notice ready on the tip of her tongue.

"Haven't I been in this barrack of a house for nearly thirty years!" she cried, "the way I'd be workin' me fingers to the bone."

" 'Twould take a damned lot of work," said he, and his eyes shot over her body from head to feet—" 'Twould take a damned lot of work to find the bones would be stickin' out of ye."

She would have hated John Desmond then if she could, but was ever in that state of mind towards him when hatred and love are no less than one and the same emotion. Nevertheless she stood there, slightly swinging the door backwards and forwards, like some feline beast lashing its tail and, for the moment, powerless in her anger to speak.

"When ye've done swingin' that door," said he, "the way I can feel the circulation of a draught round me feet would drive me mad in five minutes, will ye get back to yeer work and keep yeer temper for the kitchen range till I can afford to buy ye a new one."

"I'll do no more stroke or strive of work in this house!" she cried out with the finding of her tongue. "And 'tis not takin' notice I am afther all these years, but givin' it, the

way ye needn't put yeer hand in yeer pocket for a shillin' or a pinny piece itself."

John Desmond looked at her with a twinkle, and more than a twinkle, in his eyes. This was the spirit that made good stock and would have bred him better sons than that in the gentle creature who had left behind her the witless Timothy and the sluggard John. He turned in no bitterness to his memory of her then and made the inevitable comparison a man would make when his days are passing and life for him is greatly compassed in the youth of others.

As a man, seeing broadly, in the dispassionate autumn of his life, when the buds have long broken and the leaves have had their day, there was something in the soul of that corpulent creature as she flung her thirty years of service at his feet, asking in her pride for no recognition of a single hour, and all because he had flouted her wish to minister to his comfort—there was something in her then, he saw, which would have brought credit to the name of Desmond. He knew no less that had he youth again he would have chosen no other than he did.

"Ye're a damn fool!" said he, and having no need for manners, he spat in the fire to put an end to the matter.

"Then that's the last of ut!" she cried, and would keep her dignity whatever else she lost.

"As far as I am concerned, it is," said he. "When are ye goin'?"

"I'll not rest me head here this night," she declared.

"Then where will ye rest it, in the name of God?"

"I'll go to me brother is in Waterford," said she; and her lip trembled, and she hunted the room with her eyes, coming back inevitably to his face. " 'Tis there I'd have thanks for the things I'd be doin', and I not risin' in the mornin' till tin bi the clock, if I'd loike."

"It won't agree with ye," said he; "but ye can shut the hall-door whin ye go out, for 'tis damn cold."

He took up his book of "Irish Melodies" again, when she knew there was no more to be said. He had accepted her notice, as she might well have guessed he would; for was he not the finest of gentlemen she had ever met? He had accepted her notice, and there was no more for it but to get back to her kitchen and go on with her work.

"I'll shut the door," said she, "and I goin' out—I'll shut the door, and not slam it the way ye'd think I'd be mad to be goin'."

"Ye'd better slam it," said he, "it shuts better."

For ten minutes he sat there with the "Melodies" open on his knee, never reading a word, but with ears pricked like a dog's, listening for the sound of the door. When that time had slipped by in silence, he leaned forward in his chair and he rang the bell.

There is every need in the mind of a woman to believe she is going to do that thing which it is never in the heart of her to perform. Mrs. Slattery had gone upstairs to her room and fetched her bonnet and cape.

"I'll leave me things," said she, "and fetch 'em another day."

With that bonnet and cape in her hands, she had come downstairs and planting them on the kitchen table, had set to crying again, either because she knew she was never going to have the strength to put them on, or because she so believed in her determination to go that she thought she would soon be wearing them as she passed out of the hall-door and left that house for ever. With a woman it is very difficult to know which of these two it might be.

Whichever it was, there they lay on the table, and there she stood looking at them with the tears tumbling down her cheeks. And then the bell rang. With no instant of hesita-

tion, she snatched up the bonnet and pinned it to her head, and then came, taking her time, to the dining-room door.

"Is there anythin' ye want?" said she, standing well in the light that he might see the bonnet on her head.

He looked up, when it would have been hard for her to tell had he noticed any difference at all.

"Have ye time before ye go," he inquired, "to get me supper?"

"I have," said she quickly, and wished she had known what it was he had wanted that she might have been more deliberate in her reply.

'Well, what have ye got in the house?"

"There's only eggs," she answered.

"Great God!" said he.

"'Tis all right," she answered him. "I'll make ye a dish of eggs 'll taste better'n anythin' ye ever had in yeer life. But I must take off me bonnet if I do, for 'tis a leppin' fire is there already."

He looked up from his "Melodies" and he met her eye.

"Ye're a damn fool!" he told her.

"Shure, I know that," said she.

II

AN INGREDIENT TO A BARGAIN

IT was when his supper was almost over, the dish of eggs —as he had never tasted eggs in his life—having been consumed, and as Mrs. Slattery was bringing him his pot of tea, well-stewed as he liked it, that there fell a loud knocking on the hall-door, resounding through the vast empty spaces of that silent house.

John Desmond looked up at Mrs. Slattery. Mrs. Slattery looked down at him.

"Who's that?" said he.

She shook her head.

"I'll never get away this night," said she.

"I'm beginning to doubt it meself," he replied. "Will ye go and see who it is makin' that noise on the door?"

She went, wishing there might be thirty people knocking on the door that night, so long as they kept her from the necessity of putting the bonnet on again which she had thrown off in order to serve her supper.

It was Tim Cassidy, she said when she returned, come to see him on a little matter of business.

"Stand in front of him," said John Desmond, "the time he'd be wipin' his feet on the mat, and then show him in, the way he'll know 'tis the house of a gintleman he's comin' into."

"There is no mat," said she. "'Twas wore into a large hole, and wasn't all the mud workin' through it on to the floor. Shure, I gave it to the boy last week to shtop up a draught in one of the linneys."*

"Well, damn it, keep him there," said he, "the way ye'd expect him to be wipin' his feet and he thinkin' it was an oversight the mat was not there at all."

In the space of two or three minutes Tim Cassidy was shown into the room, twisting a hat in his hand, but keeping his bit of business well enough in mind to lose none of the wits God gave him.

From under the table John Desmond pushed out a chair with his feet and nodded to Cassidy to take it.

"'Tis only a little matter of business, Mr. Desmond, sorr," said he, "and I'd sooner be shtandin' to ut."

* Cowsheds or outbuildings.

"Ye can sit down," said John Desmond, "for when it comes to two men doin' a bit of business, there's nothin' to choose between them. Shure, they're both rascals and may as well look at each other on a level."

Having nothing to say to that, Cassidy sat down. Many a time had he dealt with John Desmond in the market, knowing him there to be one who had the way of his will, if not the best of a bargain. This, however, was the first occasion he had ventured into the house at Waterpark, and though by doing so he hoped to effect a pretty little deal for himself, he was considerably in awe of his man.

Indeed, John Desmond, mixing every month with the local farmers and small-holders in the market at Waterford, was a very different man in his own home. The same Tim Cassidy whom he met every market-day, more or less on a footing of equality since they were about the same trade, was only a small farmer, paying rent for some two hundred acres of poor land and making the ends of life meet with no little fraying of the ragged edges. But in the dining-room of John Desmond's house, where no doubt the ragged edges were still more frayed and which everyone in the county knew might be papered with his debts, Tim Cassidy took his place and stood in such regard of his host as God meant he should stand when He made the two men after His own image.

For a few brief moments, while they sat eyeing each other in silence, like cockerels preparing for the battle of the yard, John Desmond made up his mind to the issue. He would sell at his own price, whatever it was and whether he really wanted to sell it or not—he would sell at his own price, or not at all. The man who came searching for him to his house to do a deal was in sad need of the thing he wanted. In the matter of a bargain, if you can find him,

this is the man with whom to do business, and all the talking must be done by him. John Desmond waited patiently until Cassidy spoke.

When these moments had passed and silence became no longer possible, the farmer looked up from the table with the pale little eyes he had and said:

"'Tis goin' to be a damn fine night."

Whether that had reference to the weather or to the bargain he expected to make for himself, it would have been impossible to say. In any case, John Desmond let it pass without further elaboration.

"It is," said he, and maintained himself in patience.

"I seen yeer young ladies and they goin' off to a dance," Cassidy continued a moment later.

"They are," replied John Desmond.

"Would it be Stradbally they were goin'? I heard speak of doin's there this night."

"They were," said John.

"They've got a damn fine night for the drive," said Cassidy.

"And 'tis a damn fine night ye have yeerself," retorted John Desmond, "for talkin' all this blather about dances at Stradbally! Is it comin' up to the house ye were to know did Miss Sophie wear her pink or her blue, or what is it ye wanted, in the name of God?"

"I had thim tellin' me ye wanted to sell the black mare," said Cassidy, opening proceedings under compulsion and with the first inevitable lie with which these matters are invariably begun.

It was a lie that would hang more easily than most upon his conscience—if it could be said he had a conscience at all; for though certainly he had never been told the fact, he knew from other sources that John Desmond

was more heavily in debt than usual, when it may be supposed that though he does not give it out, a man will be ready to sell the shirt from off his back to a firm bidder.

"Who told ye that lie?" demanded John Desmond promptly and without hesitation. Cassidy gave him chapter and verse, name and address, as though he had been prepared for that question from the very beginning of negotiations.

What is more, he gave him the name of a neighboring farmer with whom John Desmond was on such terms as men can best express with a stick. There was no possibility of corroboration—he made sure of that. The name, moreover, had come readily to his mind since this same Michael Healy to whom he referred had confessed himself as eager to buy the black mare, but would—as he put it—"have neither talk nor deal with that high-handed devil, not if it was to get me pennance for thirrty years."

"Shure, the curse of Cromwell on him," said he, "he'll make a rope of his own pride, and one of these days won't he hang himself, and 'twill be a good riddance to these parts, I'm tellin' ye."

" 'Tis a pity ye couldn't buy the mare," said Cassidy.

"It is that," Healy had replied, "for I'd give a hundred and fifty pound for her, and begorra wouldn't she breed her worth with one foal."

The pale eyes of Tim Cassidy had narrowed at that in swift appreciation of any man who was ready to part with his money.

"If I can get her for a hundred and fifty for ye," said he, "will ye give me two pound on the deal?"

Michael Healy had spat on his hand and laid it with its spittle in the palm of Tim Cassidy's. No less than this,

then, was the origin of his visit to Waterpark that evening.

When, then, he gave the name of Michael Healy as his informant, the wrath of John Desmond came out of him as the first clap of thunder bursts suddenly out of the gathering clouds.

"What the hell does he know about it!" he shouted.

"Maybe 'tis the way he wanted to set it about she was not worth the hundred pounds ye gave for her," suggested Cassidy, who knew no more than Adam what he had paid and whose only concern was to fix a sum in John Desmond's mind upon which all future negotiations might be conducted.

"Niver mind what I paid for her!" John Desmond cried, who even in his rage kept a shrewd hold upon the facts. "Niver mind what I paid for her. She's worth a damn sight more than a hundred today."

"Well, it had no effect on me," said Cassidy, "for I'd give a hundred for her meself;" and with a big red pocket-handkerchief, he blew his nose to drown the sound of his own words, well knowing that a man's hearing is never so acute as when the talk is of money; moreover, what he hears with difficulty has a more subtle value than that which he hears with ease.

John Desmond heard it right enough, and having bought the beast for fifty pounds from one of those gentleman farmers who play the game for the fun of it, and have that devil's luck to hit upon a good thing at times and as often part with their bargain, was sorely tempted with the sound of that sum which as good as lay upon the table before him.

But the first sum mentioned by one side or the other in a bargain of this kind is merely the indication of the way

things are to go. That sum, indeed, is a pivot upon which the scales swing upwards for the buyer and must inevitably descend for the man who sells. If Cassidy had begun with a hundred pounds, it was as like as not he would rise to a hundred and fifty, and such being the case, there is only one way to expedite matters. John Desmond declared that the beast was not for sale at all.

"If a' be that's so," said Cassidy, and he rose to his feet, "shure, I'm only wastin' yeer time, an' I wid a sow is farrowin' the time I'd be gettin' back to the house."

In a deal such as this, which is all a question of thrust and counter, counter and thrust, this reply of Tim Cassidy's is the only answer to the statement that no business is to be done. For if the statement be true, then persuasion will bring no odds to it, and if it is not, there is no man living will let another go away with his money in his pocket before he has duly counted it first.

Not only did Cassidy rise to his feet, however, but he made a movement towards the door, and this movement it was that had as much bearing as anything else beside upon the molding of our story.

To stop him going out of that door was as good as showing that John Desmond did not want him to go; as good as showing that a hundred pounds was his price, and he would take it then and there without another word about it. Only one way there remained, without self-commitment, to return to the discussion of the bargain; and without thought for one moment of the result of what he did, John Desmond rang the bell for the second time that evening.

"Shure, ye'll have a drop before ye go," said he.

Cassidy twisted his hat twice in his hands and then sat down again.

III

A MATTER OF GUINEAS

HAVING received her order, Mrs. Slattery went back to the kitchen with a blessing on her lips that should have gone far to the saving of Tim Cassidy's soul, towards which it was directed.

"'Tis not for me to say a drop of drink is better for a man," said she aloud, "than all the songs he has there readin' on his knee. But 'twill put him in a good humor for his bargain, whatever it is;" and before setting all the ingredients for the bowl of punch upon the tray, she took her bonnet off the table and flung it into a cupboard to take up later to her room.

"I want a new one," said she, and so explained to herself the contemptuous treatment of it.

When she returned to the dining-room, they had come back in their conversation by devious ways to the black mare, and without so much as a drop of drink at all. The sum tentatively mentioned by Cassidy and ignored by John Desmond had risen to a hundred guineas.

"Here's the stuff," said John Desmond, with a smacking of his hands together that made thunder in that high-ceilinged room. And in his heart he meant it was the stuff with which to ease the making of a difficult bargain.

Talking of anything but the discussion in hand in order that this means of detaining his guest might seem no more than a mere accident of hospitality, he brewed the punch in the steaming bowl with all his old quality of cunning. But it was not until he had lifted his glass, until the hot liquid had passed his lips and the first fatal fumes had entered his

nostrils, that he realized the full force of the temptation into which he had led himself that night.

"Here's to a litter of fourteen," said he, holding up his glass again after the first draught; for with this willingness of his guest to stay, he knew by now there was no beast in her farrowing, and he might be drinking to a litter of fifty for all the work Tim Cassidy or his sow would have to do that night.

There was a jovial ring of good-nature in his voice as he gave out the toast to which he drank, but behind it, to one who had known him well, there were signs of fear as when a man, after years of health, comes suddenly upon the dread symptoms of an old disease he had thought was long purged from his blood.

His, however, was not the nature to play with fear or entertain its company for more than a passing moment. In three minutes he had emptied his glass and the apprehension was all gone from him. It was a convincing argument that the situation had demanded this treatment of it. By no other means, except through the exposure of his hand, could he have persuaded Tim Cassidy to stay; and what was a glass or two when it concerned a matter of business to which a profit of fifty pounds and more was safely attached?

"Shure, I'll give Pat the finest ball-dress she'll ever have in her life," said he to himself as he filled his second glass, when, easing his conscience with that promised transaction, he put all fear finally from him and set to the squeezing of Tim Cassidy, determined to lift him to the highest price he would go.

By midnight, passing from one subject to another and returning always to the black mare, the sum on offer had risen to a hundred and twenty pounds. By this time, with the eighth glass full before him on the table, Cassidy was

talking of his willingness to give as much as two hundred and fifty for a mare like that, if he did not know that John Desmond had paid two hundred for her in the first place. As it was, and taking his ignorance of her price into account, one hundred and twenty was as much as he could see himself parting with that night.

"She's a damned fine beast," said he, and he kept on saying it with all the naked truth of a man in his cups. But drunk as he was, Michael Healy's hundred and fifty pounds never left the dead centre of his circle of consciousness. He wore it like a talisman in his mind, still capable of realizing how every mounting of his price defaced its beauty.

For an hour at least one hundred and twenty pounds was the figure beyond which Tim Cassidy would not move. He added, however, to the number of his glasses, and when it came to such time as he realized that in a few moments he might not be responsible for the things he said, while there across the table sat the hardened John Desmond, who was known to be able to carry his drink better than any man in the county of Waterford, then he lurched unsteadily to his feet, determined then and there to put an end to it.

"One hundred and twenty *guineas,*" said he thickly—"there's the top of me price, and shure, God help us, 'tis a hard man ye are to be drivin' a bargain. Faith, if I could take as much drink as ye'd take yeerself, 'tis no more than a hundred and tin I'd be offerin' ye this minute now."

John Desmond stood up as well, as straight and as steady as a tree; for light though his head was after all these years of abstinence, his pride was as much in his strength as in his word.

"Well, that's a bargain!" he cried, and, omitting only the customary expectoration, he brought his hand down with such force upon Tim Cassidy's, that the intoxicated man

fell back again into his chair. And there stood John Desmond, with more drink inside him that night than any man living could have borne after ten years of total abstinence, there he stood, to all appearances as steady as a rock, looking down at his man. And there his man lay, as John Desmond would have wished to see him, spent and finished after a hard fight and a good bargain.

"That sow," said he, "will have a litter of twenty by this;" and he lifted Tim Cassidy to his feet. Taking him out into the hall, he put his stick in his hand, thrust his hat on his head, and opened the door, when the night wind came like the breath of a ministering angel upon their faces.

"Can ye make yeer way back?" said John Desmond.

"I can," said Cassidy, "if ye'll turn me the right way to begin."

He helped him down the broken steps on to the weedy gravel drive, and, taking him by the shoulders, he turned him in the direction of that belt of trees through which the little doctor had ridden that night on the heels of the gray mare, with his heart leaping like a thing alive in his mouth.

"Go straight down the road," said John Desmond, "and for God's sake keep yeerself out of the trees. There's a pond is there, drowned a heifer of mine last year, and 'tis no fit place for a man to sleep in."

Tim Cassidy braced himself together with a deep sigh. He wiped the cold sweat off his forehead and he put out his right leg, waiting in his mind till it reached the ground. When he felt the earth solid beneath him, he said, "I shall be all right," adding, "please God," as if there were much to doubt about it, and set off down the drive like a water-logged ship, half sinking in the hollows of the sea.

IV

THE BROKEN OATH

JOHN DESMOND stood there till he was out of sight, which in that dark night was not far to go, a smile broadening across his face as he watched the efforts of that sorry object to which, in a matter of three hours, he had reduced Tim Cassidy. When the black night had taken him in its jaws, he turned up the steps, and none too steadily now. All need for his mighty effort of control had departed with that lurching figure gone into the darkness. He was a drunken man, and he knew it, but there was none other save Mrs. Slattery in the house to tell how he had broken his pledge of temperance that night. For another three hours at least those children would not be returned from Stradbally, and there was a night's rest in front of him.

"But, my God!" said he as he swung into the dining-room, "I must have another drink before I'd be gettin' to me bed."

He lifted the bottle of whisky with which to mix his last jorum. It was empty. He cursed it and put it down, and then he rang the bell.

There was no going to bed for Mrs. Slattery in that house so long as her master was up. She knew her duties, she hoped, and woke with a start out of her sleep by the kitchen fire as the sound of the bell jangled in her ears. Rubbing her eyes, she came happily to the door, more glad than she could have described that there was still a call for her.

The moment she entered the room she saw what had

happened. There stood her master, as she had known him of old for almost every night of the first twenty years of her service, a man ready in his tempers with his tongue, but no less ready with the generosity of his hand, and with as stout a heart as you could wish to find between Cork and Connemara. Had she, indeed, been put upon her oath, full-understanding the serious purport of it, there is little doubt she would have given a preference to that twenty years of her service, rather than to that ten with a man who sat reading his "Irish Melodies" and brewed his tea strong for the mere sake of having something with a taste to it.

"D'ye want anything at all?" said she, and with half a glance, if merely from the dejected attitude of it on the table, saw that the black bottle was empty, and what it was was needed of her then.

"D'ye want anything at all?" she repeated, this second time in the tone of one who asks, not for the need of information, but to help the matter out.

He looked at the black bottle on the table. He looked at her. Having told her on two separate occasions to take the damned stuff away, she thought it was no more than a question of pride with him then, little dreaming how, in that moment, it all lay against the honor of his bargain with the Lord God.

Had it been the matter merely of pouring the last drop out of the black bottle—that one last drink before he went to bed—he would not have hesitated so long as to take the breath of deliberation. But to fetch a new bottle, listening to all those sounds of a cork being drawn, to that gurgle of the liquid which only a full bottle, young in its possibilities, knows how to make, that was a temptation before which he stood in no uncertain apprehension.

He turned his eyes for the last time on Mrs. Slattery, in

just such a mood as when a man spins a coin, or when, knowing full well the unfaltering indecision of his mind, puts it to chance to make it up for him.

"Would ye say I was drunk?" he asked, and stood with his full height by the mantelpiece, summoning in this final effort to keep his word, the last of that amazing assurance with which he had maintained his pride in the presence of Tim Cassidy.

A moment passed in silence as Mrs. Slattery, with her head critically on one side, stood watching him, caught up in a wonder of what she was expected to say. But the length of that moment was too great a strain for him. The line of the wall behind Mrs. Slattery's broad back tilted to a sharp angle in the shaking balance of his mind. He swayed against the mantelpiece to set it right.

"I'm not getting the gout, surely, at this time of me life," said he, and caught up his foot and rubbed it with his hand to give account for that unsteadiness. It deceived her, however, no more than it did him. What is more, she remembered that ominous prophecy of the little doctor's so many years ago, when, wishing to keep him from all that hunger of the drink she saw crept back again to his eyes, she said the thing it seemed most like to save him from himself.

"Is it the way you want the trooth?" said she.

"I do," he replied. "Shure, what call is there for you to be tellin' lies and neither of us believin' 'em? I want the naked trooth," he added, "for it means the divvle of a lot to me."

"'Tis drunk ye are, then," said she, believing it was better for him that he should go back to his moping and his melodies, whatever the loss might mean to her, and that this was the quickest way to send him.

"Are ye sure of that?" said he.

"I am," said she.

"And how do you know it?" he asked.

"There's a twinkle in your eye," said she, "would make me laugh and I standin' before the Lord God in the lonesome wastes of heaven itself—let alone the gout's in your foot," said she.

With a great breath of relief, he let go his endurance then, and swinging across the room to where she stood, he clapped his hands on her ample shoulders, and he laughed into her face like a boy that is let out of school.

"Yirra, didn't I do me best!" he said, "an' I shtandin' there as straight as a plasterer's lathe, till the wall went crooked on me, and I leanin' against the mantelpiece to keep the house from tumblin'! I did my best to make ye think I was sober, but if ye can see me the way I'd be drunk, then, glory be to God, give me another bottle and let me have the joy of it. The half of a thing is no damn good to any man. Get me another bottle, I'm saying. If I've broken me oath, shure I'll break it dacint. 'Tis a whole break has hopes of mendin'."

She left him then, at her wits' end, though with some hope of light in the darkness of her bewilderment. He had broken his oath!

To whom, then, had he sworn to keep sober, and why? She talked about it loudly to herself on the way to the kitchen, while she drew the cork out of the bottle, and no less on her way back to the dining-room.

" 'Tis a quare thing," said she, over and over again, and felt no little hurt to her pride that it had been kept a secret from her.

"Ain't I thirty years in service," she muttered, lowering her voice as she came to the door, "and if alterations the

like of that are going to be made in the house, shure, oughtn't I to be told about it? I ought, of course."

She was determined, therefore, in her own phrasing, to learn the rights of it, and came again into the presence of John Desmond, with little resemblance of spirit to the woman she had been but a few hours before.

"Here's your drink," said she, and stood the bottle on the table with a clatter that pronounced the temper of her mind.

"Here's your drink, and I'd like to know the meaning of all this blather about taking the stuff away, the way ye'd be cursin' me one minute for bringin' it, and orderin' me to fetch it the next. I'm no child!" said she, beginning to work herself into high spirits at the thought of the injuries that had been dealt out to her. "I'm no child!"

"I've thought a lot of quare things about ye," said he, "but I've never made a mistake as egreegious as that."

"Well, then, what's on ye," she cried, "to be makin' play with me as if I were? Didn't I bring these things to ye three hours ago, and ye sober, the way ye'd be puttin' the curse on me for a meddlesome old woman, and isn't it drunk ye are now, and ye beggin' for more."

" 'Tis not the man would be sober would be wantin' the drink, the like of him drunk, and he needin' the entertainment of a second bottle to keep company with the first. If ye'll sit down, then," said he, "for it makes the legs ache under me to see the weight ye'd be carryin' for a mere matter of civility—if ye'll sit down there, I'll tell ye the whole business while I have the sinse in me to be seein' what I'm lookin' at. I'll give ye the whole business, and 'tis yeerself is sober can tell me what is the rights of it before Almighty God."

Having brewed himself another bowl and lit his pipe,

without which, it was his habit to say, no man knew the spirit of contentment, he proceeded to give her the whole account of Father Casey's visit to Waterpark that night wellnigh ten years before.

One way and another she looked at him all through his narration of the incident, sometimes shaking her head as she considered the imprudence of his part of the bargain, at others laughing loud at the wit he had in his descriptions of Father Casey.

"There he sat," said he, pointing to the chair the little priest had occupied, "the way he might have been in an attorney's office, and be drawin' out a deed to make his client a good man in the eyes of the world and the very divvle himself in the eyes of God."

"Could any attorney do that?" said she.

"He could," said he. "'Tis that way a priest has a bigger business than wan would be paintin' his name on an office window. Shure, doesn't he spend half his days gittin' a man to make his promises to the Lord God, and the other half in makin' the peace of the pore fella with the Lord God for breakin' 'em? 'Tis a grand trade, I'm tellin' ye, for 'tis that way a man gets paid both sides of the counter. But 'tis damn pore pay," he added, "and I dunno would he make a livin' out of it if there were nine days in a short week."

For a while he pulled at his pipe, losing all count of the matter in hand, with joy it was to be indifferent once again to the beauties of the "Irish Melodies."

It was Mrs. Slattery, sitting down on one of the dining-room chairs and uncomfortable in that familiarity with her master, who, having twisted a button on her dress till it hung by a mere thread, set the conversation going again by asking him what he was going to do now.

"I'm not sayin'," said she quickly, "that I'd want to have ye keep yeer bargain, and I'm not sayin' I'd like to have ye break it, for 'tis great honor that child would be havin', and she with a vocation for the holy life."

"In the name of God, then," he shouted suddenly, "what are ye sayin' at all? If there's one thing that beats me, it is a woman when she has to be explainin' her mind, and she tying the wits of the Lord God into an almighty knot the way it 'ud tease the patience of any saint in heaven to be untyin' it for Him. Am I drunk? That's the first question. Will ye answer me that?"

Notwithstanding that she had given her opinion on this matter some time before, when he had taken less drink even than at that moment, she looked at him with the light of a fresh intelligence in her eyes.

"There's being drunk and havin' a drop taken," said she, shrewdly preparing for the change in her opinion. But he would have none of that. In the state of mind he was then, he felt happy enough to admit the most damning evidence against himself.

"There is," said he cheerfully, "and I thank the Almighty God it is possible for a man to be pleadin' guilty on both counts at the same time. Shure, isn't the floor of this dining-room swimming around like a boat would be tossin' gently in a—in a—summer swell of the sey? And aren't those candles there dancin' about on the table like four acolytes at a High Mass? Glory be to God, would ye want there to be more drink in a man than that and still call him sober? Why, ye've got the most beautiful expression on your face ever I saw in my life, and if that doesn't convince ye that I'm drunk ye'll have to take me word for it. Oh, shure I'm drunk, but the question is, will I be doing better for that child if I confess it, and she going

her ways into a convent after all. Shure, damn it, woman! ye've been drinkin' nothin' stronger than tea for the last fifty years, and ye ought to be sober enough to give me an answer to that."

"I'm not sayin' it won't be a great honor," she began again.

"Shure, we know that," said he, "and 'twould be a great honor for me to be crowned at Westminster with all those dirty Saxons bendin' their knees to me, but I doubt wouldn't I sooner be a free man drinkin' me punch at this table."

"The question is," continued Mrs. Slattery, taking no more notice of him, now that his condition was accepted by both—"the question is, would ye ever be sober again if ye lose her after all these years?"

"Shure, that's no question at all," said he. "I'm gettin' on for sixty years, and 'tis no matter one way or another could I blow out a candle in one puff or twenty. The question is—— What the hell is that?"

He held up his hand, and they both sat there, rigid in silence as they listened.

Up the drive came the sound of a horse's hoofs as it toiled wearily over the gravel drive, with the crunching noise of wheels behind it.

V

A LITTLE MATTER OF HONESTY

THERE was a moment's space when Mrs. Slattery looked to her master for a course of action. But when the sound of a man's voice outside reached

their ears, and it was the voice of Father Casey, at which John Desmond made no movement or signified his intention of escape, the good woman laid bare the plain intention of her mind regarding Patricia, and, as ten thousand women would have done in a similar plight, sought refuge in evasion.

With four stupendous blasts from her inflated cheeks, she blew out the candles, bringing the room to darkness and, with the tremor of a smile twitching the corner of his lip, he stood there in silence watching her. When the last one was put out, there was a broad smile over his face, and he spoke with that voice she knew well was bordering upon laughter.

"What did you do that for?" said he.

"Didn't ye hear Father Casey an' he speakin' outside?" she exclaimed in a wonder at his lethargy.

"I did," said he, "but that's not the way to welcome him. What did ye do it for?"

There was now the quaver of tears in her voice as she replied that she had done it to save him from discovery.

"If ye creep up quietly through this other door," said she, "ye can get to your bedroom and go in yeer stockin' vamps, the way no person 'ud be hearin' ye, and ye can slip into yeer bed and be as fast asleep as a beast and he stiff and dead."

"I could," said he, and he struck a match, lighting the four candles with an unsteady hand.

"Well, why aren't ye doin' it in the name of God?" she cried.

"I've not been stealing the jam out of the cupboard," said he, "which is a theft any man might escape his whippin' for if he was hungry. I've been breakin' me bargain with the Lord God, which is a sairious offense, and if a' be I

can't stand up straight before Father Casey and deceive him like an honest man, shure, I must take the consequences."

Mrs. Slattery lifted her hands in a mute appeal to heaven, and put them back again upon her breast. John Desmond bent forward, leaning upon the table for support, and looked close into her face.

"Let's have no more of all yeer blather about the honor of a vocation for Pat," said he, and the tone of his voice was thick, but it was shrewd in the sound of it. "Ye've got a big enough heart of yeer own," said he, "will satisfy the Lord God and He sittin' in Heaven with His scales weighin' out the good and bad. There's no call for ye to be like them miserable, strivin' creatures, would be no more than dealers for the Almighty God, the way they'd be collectin' the souls of others to keep their own from damnation. Open that door now, the while I'd be seein' could I walk straight out into the hall and find out what the hell all this noise is about."

She turned to the door and she opened it, sniffing at the tears that were beginning to glisten on her cheeks.

"Open it wide," said he, "the way I shall be sure of it. Isn't the whole damn place like a tossin' ship and I dunno whether to put me feet to the floor or wait till it comes to me. Are ye all right now? Well, come along now and tell me if I'm bearing for the scullery."

He swayed across the room and out into the hall, when the expression on Mrs. Slattery's face was as one who has put her last penny on the gambling board and seen it swept away.

With a magnificent gesture, she swung the hall door open, and there stood Father Casey at the very moment of lifting the knocker in his hand.

VI

THE CASE AGAINST JOHN DESMOND

"SHE'S all right," said Father Casey as he passed through the doorway. "Ye needn't worry yeerself, she's all right. Mickey McNamara lent his carriage, and she's come back the way she might ha' been lying in a feather bed."

This he considered was the best way to break bad news, but to John Desmond, sensitive already in his conscience, it sounded like a second visitation of God.

He made up his mind to it that something had happened to his Pat, and the fear of it—as with the fear that came upon him once before—chilled him to a sudden sobriety. He held fast on the handle of the door and, in the dim light from those four candles in the dining-room, he stared at Father Casey, unable for that first moment to speak the apprehension of his mind.

"Which is it?" he asked at last, as he saw them outside, bringing a helpless burden from the carriage. Notwithstanding all their gentleness, he heard a groan of pain as they bore it across the drive to the steps.

Hearing that moan as well, Mrs. Slattery, standing behind him, could bear it no longer. They are all fatalists in Ireland, and the same fear as in John Desmond's mind was plucking at her heart. With a little smothered cry, she pushed past him and hurried down the steps.

"Which is it?" repeated John Desmond in a broken whisper.

"'Tis Margaret," said Father Casey. "The poor thing got her hair caught alight in one of those gimcrack Chinese

lanterns, and 'tis burrnt she is on her head and neck. But she's all right. Here's Dr. O'Connor with her. They called him up as they came through Portlaw and they sent for me, they fearin' she might be worse than she was."

They stood outside in the hall as the burden was brought in and carried straight away upstairs, Mrs. Slattery speeding off to the kitchen to prepare soothing bandages, ready as she would be on the last day of her life to ease the pains and troubles of that household.

The other girls went immediately up into their rooms, and John Desmond, wiping the moisture off his forehead with a great red pocket-handkerchief, walked straight into the dining-room, never considering, with that violent reaction of relief, the proof of his guilt which was to be found there.

With a rubbing of his hands, Father Casey foHowed him, and at the sight of the liquid still steaming in the punch-bowl, the one black bottle confessing its emptiness apart from the rest and the other uncorked upon the tray, his eyes shot forward in a swift glance at the man whose bargain with the Lord God he had witnessed and ratified in that very dining-room ten years before.

"Been havin' a drop of the stuff?" said he quietly, and John Desmond turned round to the realization of that damning piece of evidence before him.

"There was Tim Cassidy," said he, by no means, even in the face of those silent yet potent witnesses, admitting his defeat—"there was Tim Cassidy and he anxious to buy a horse of me. And 'twas the divvle's own chance I sold it to him at all."

With graphic and illuminating touches, full of wit and brimming with the humor of observation which was only additional proof of his intoxication in the mind of Father

Casey, he tried to distract the suspicion of the little priest by a vivid description of the interview that had taken place.

" 'There's no sale then,' says I, and didn't he get up to his feet and he goin' straight to the door like the crafty divvle he is. 'If there's no sale,' says he, 'shure, I'd better be gettin' home, for I've a sow is farrowin' this night, and I must git home and help her through with it.' And there was a man wouldn't lift his little finger to help his wife through a parcel of twins if a' be there was a shillin' he'd lost in his own rickyard. So what did I do?"

"Ah, what did ye do?" inquired Father Casey, and John Desmond knew that he was no better than a criminal in the witness-box, giving his own evidence in the cold hearing of a cross-examining barrister who had no more heart in him than would serve to bring evidence of the satisfied conviction already in his mind.

"What did ye do?" he repeated.

"I stretched out me arm," said John Desmond, and with a certain degree of caution, he illustrated the action as he spoke, "and I rang the bell. 'Ye'll have a little drop,' says I, 'before you go,' and begorra, he took to ut, and didn't he shtop and didn't he have a drop and didn't I make a bargain worth seventy-five pounds on that horse, which'll put me in the way of givin' ye a nice little subscription to that new organ or whatever it is ye have playin' the little tchunes of a Sunda'."

Even a cross-examining barrister is human and will thaw for a moment under the warm breath of a compliment, though it may come from the lips of the criminal in the dock himself, and Father Casey was sadly in need of funds for that new organ. He had appealed to Waterpark some weeks before, and in vain. There was not a penny in the house at that time, and as John Desmond said, he could

sing out of tune just as well with an old organ as with a new one.

But that moment of pleasurable warmth at the thought of a substantial subscription to his cherished ambition soon passed.

The look hardened in his eyes, as he turned them once more upon those two black bottles standing on the table, and John Desmond knew that much of the battle between them was yet to be fought, that the odds of it, moreover, were still against him.

"It took a fair dowsing of drink to get that much profit out of him," said Father Casey, "and to all appearances he had to drink it out of two glasses to get it down."

"Oh, shure, I had a drop meself," said John Desmond promptly, seeking to tell no lies with his lips, whatever he might be acting with that strain of endurance he was now putting upon himself. For he knew that Father Casey would never ask him point blank if he were drunk, however long he might stay there in that room in his silent determination to find it out for himself.

It was up against his own indomitable power of will and the way he carried himself to prove that he was sober, therefore it was all opposed to the nature of the man to win his verdict with a paltry lie upon his tongue.

"Oh, I had a drop," said he. "Shure, I couldn't let him be drinkin' there alone, the way he'd be sipping a glass for want of company and he goin' the time it was empty with divvle a warmth in him to make a bargain at all."

"I gather," said Father Casey slowly—"I gather it took the best part of two bottles to warm him to a profit of seventy-five pounds."

"It did so," said John Desmond. "Shure, I'll give that fella the credit of being the hardest drinker ever I met.

Didn't he sit up straight to ut for two hours, for 'twas the best stuff he'd tasted ever in his life. I haven't forgot the way to make it, mind ye."

"I suppose not," said Father Casey. "I suppose not."

John Desmond leant with an assumed negligence against the mantelpiece. He knew it was a matter of minutes now before the full tide of his condition should turn back upon him again, when nothing short of the stiffest glass of punch he could brew would give him the necessary strength to persist in the strain of his endurance.

"If I can get him out of the room," he thought, "and start him on his ways back to Portlaw, 'tis only the suspicion he'll have, and shure, hasn't he got that already?"

In the process of his intention and to pave the way for the excuse he had at hand, he threw back his head and he yawned with all the stretching of his jaws and all the noise that he could make about it. As though he had never heard a sound of it, Father Casey sat down and, taking off his spectacles, began cleaning them as though the night was a young thing and at the disposal of both of them. John Desmond groaned in his heart and his wits grew muddled with fatigue.

There was only one thing for it. He came, a careful man, to the table, he sat down himself and, without a moment's hesitation, he took the punch-ladle in his hand.

"Come along," said he, forcing a cheerful note above the lassitude of his voice. "We'll just finish this off before we go to bed. Shure, wouldn't it be a sin to let it stop here and be spoilt in the cold. Ye can have a drop yeerself—that wineglass will suit the abstemious fella ye are."

"And ye'll have it in the tumbler," said Father Casey.

"I will so. A little drop like that wouldn't be breakin' me bargain with the Lord God."

He knew he was talking wildly now, and was conscious that all the caution of his wits had no power to control the boisterousness of his tongue. There were indeed two men within him, warring for the ascendancy over all he did and said.

One he could hear, crying out distinctly, but quite distant, as though at the end of a far tunnel beneath that mountain of his will. The other strode and footed it rampageously in the very forefront of his brain. With that last glass of punch he trusted to gather his scattering wits, and marshal them for his protection until the little priest should go.

And there sat Father Casey, sipping the genteel portion in his wineglass and watching him drink it with those eyes John Desmond had once said before had more speech in them than ever he allowed upon the liberty of his tongue.

The whole tumblerful he drained without leaving his glass, and when empty brought it down with a resounding blow upon the table, notwithstanding that there was that distant voice crying out to him to lay it down as if he were on the very best of his behavior.

"Oh, thank God for that!" said he, and seeing Father Casey's eyes watching him, knowing, moreover, all that the closeness of that observation meant, he could not but appreciate the humor of that sober man sitting there waiting to see if he was drunk. So ludicrous did it seem to him then than he threw back his head. With all thought gone for that suffering girl upstairs, he shouted aloud with uproarious laughter.

"For God's sake!" exclaimed Father Casey, "don't dis-

turb the girl!" And when, at the remembrance of that, John Desmond's laughter died away in his throat, he leaned across the table and he looked into the face of his host. "What in the name of Heaven were ye laughing at?" said he.

"I was laughing," said John Desmond, when there came the twinkle into his eyes again. "I was laughing to think of ye sitting there like an old owl waiting for a mouse to come out of its hole. I was laughing to think of ye still scrapin' yeer brain and wonderin' was I sober or drunk and ye in two minds about it this very minute. Why, glory be to God, man, here have I been a total abstainer for ten mortal years, and haven't I drunk enough this night would keep ye sick in yeer bed for a week? Didn't I send Tim Cassidy away from this door more than an hour ago, and he walkin' on his feet the way they'd be lumps of lead and his head goin' round like the gallopin'-horses at a fair—tchunes and all. I did indeed, and I've made another bottle the way it 'ud be leaning towards the ash-heap since then, and can't I stand on my feet this minute would take more than the weight of your dainty little body in its black cloth to push me over!"

To prove it all in the arrogance of his intoxication, he leapt up of a sudden from his chair, and was scarcely on his feet when they crumpled up under him. With a cry on his lips, he sank back into his seat again.

There was no trace of laughter in his eyes now. He sat there with a glazed stare, watching Father Casey, half-conscious in the stupor and bewilderment of his brain that the violence of the second man in him had satisfied the first that the game was up and that he sat there, convicted before his tribunal, convicted of breaking his bargain with the Lord God.

VII

THE VERDICT

AS though they had served his purpose, Father Casey took the spectacles from off his nose, put them away in their case and thrust them back into his pocket.

"John Desmond," said he, in all that judicial aloofness that has no room for pity in its heart, "ye've broken yeer bargain, and it doesn't need meself to tell ye as an honest man what the Almighty God'll be expecting of ye."

There could have been no shrewder way of putting it than that, for honesty is a virtue a man may well have some pride in, and John Desmond kept it by him even amongst rogues.

"Must Pat go into the convent?" said he.

"'Tis not a case of must," replied Father Casey, knowing his man, for the sound of that word grated on his ears. "She's in the way of thinking she has a vocation already, and ye, bein' a man of yeer word, will encourage it in her, and I'll make all the arrangements for her to be received next year. 'Tis no good, the world knows, for a girl has those holy thoughts in her mind to be gaddin' about goin' to dances and flirtin' with the young fellas. I hope to goodness there were none of them this night at Stradbally talkin' their nonsense to her, for 'tis a pretty thing she was with her black hair on her head and that puff-and-bubble dress she had made up for herself."

John Desmond gripped both hands on the arms of his chair and stared into the ashes of his fire.

"'Tis the prettiest she is of the whole damn lot," said he. "I've been watching her meself, and she growin' up the way

when she's twenty she'll give Sophie ten pounds in the saddle and leave her standin'! How would it be," he added suddenly as the last faint hope came to him out of the blackness in his heart—"how would it be if we had her down here and put it to herself? Shure, damn it, man! 'tis herself would be leavin' the world and wouldn't she have some say in it."

"Faith, they've gone to bed," said Father Casey, not liking the sound of this proposal at all and feeling that, as the agent of God, he was being cajoled into the snare of a side-issue by which this crafty tenant on his Master's estate might yet evade his obligations.

"Haven't we been sitting here this twenty minutes and more," said he, "and won't they be in bed and asleep in less?"

John Desmond looked up at him and smiled, and, seeing that the verdict had already been passed upon him, he helped himself without compunction to another ladleful of the fast-cooling punch.

"Have ye ever seen a girl afther her first dance?" said he. "Have ye ever seen her gettin' herself to bed?"

"I have not," snapped Father Casey. "Shure, why would I?"

"Well, I won't tell ye the garments she takes off of herself," said he, "but there are about five, not countin' her dress and the things she has in her hair and hangin' round her neck and shtuck about all over her like baubles in a jackdaw's nest. I won't tell ye what they are, for ye wouldn't understand it if I did, but I'll tell ye this, with every damn one she takes off, she shtands for half an hour lookin' at it, and if there's no one about, she'll tell herself tales about it, what she thought it looked like—the things that could be seen, mind you—and what she imagines other

people thought it looked like. And shure, glory be to God, with a girl and she doin' that, it'll take her the best part of the night till mornin' to get herself in between the sheets, and like as not, when she's got there, she'll up again, the way she'll be wonderin' wouldn't her hair have looked better hangin' down like some other girl's she's seen, at the back of her neck. And damn it, man! she'll set to then and begin tryin' it in front of the glass. Gone to bed! God help us! shure, she'll be fit to be seen for another hour yet."

This was knowledge of the world that Father Casey could set no argument against. When John Desmond leaned over and rang the bell for the fourth time that evening, he could say nothing.

"Will ye tell Miss Pat," said he, "there's a serious matter I'm talkin' with Father Casey, and I'd like her to shtep downstairs for a minute, for it concerns herself."

Mrs. Slattery went out without a word, knowing that things had indeed gone badly for their cause, but that there was still hope. As she closed the door, Father Casey demanded it as his right that if Patricia did come down to them, it should be he and no other who would put the case as it stood.

"Ye can say what ye like," said John Desmond. "I put myself entirely in yeer hands, and 'tis yeerself should have a brass plate screwed into the center panel of yeer door."

Father Casey made no inquiry as to the meaning of this last remark, and there for some moments they sat in silence. At last the door opened, when Patricia stood before them in her dressing-gown, with her black hair hanging in dark clouds over her shoulders.

"What did I tell ye," exclaimed John Desmond. "There's a good hour's hard work, doin' nothin', before that child 'ud be in bed. Come here to me," said he, and held out his

hand. She came and took it in her own, when she could feel his fingers stroking her wrist and knew that some serious thing must be expected of her then.

"Here's the priest has a little tale to be tellin' ye," said he, "and will ye give both ears to ut, for 'tis more important than all the ball-dresses ye saw this night at Stradbally."

With that introduction, Father Casey began, and told her the whole story from the night of her birth to that very moment when they were all met there in that very room which had been the scene of all those happenings. Over the first part he stumbled awkwardly, at a loss for words that were not to be found in his clerical vocabulary.

"Ah, get on with it!" exclaimed John Desmond at this point of the story. "Faith, don't ye know that no girl of sixteen is a fool? Shure, damn it, man! 'tis no shame to be born. Wouldn't ye be blushing this moment to the roots of yeer hair if it were? Ah, get on with it!"

And Father Casey stumbled on, coming to the end of his narration of that first night's events with a sigh of relief, and passing on to the safer waters of the later progressions of the story.

" 'Twas himself there sent for ye," said he when he had finished, "the way he has hopes in him yet to be gettin' out of his bargain with the Lord God."

The hand upon her wrist let go its hold. John Desmond put her away from him.

"Let her answer for herself," said he. "Ye've got yeer nose in the world, Father Casey, and I've got me two feet, though I can't stand on 'em. There's neither of us two would be a credit to any convent with a black veil over our heads, what's more, it's herself will have to wear it. Let her answer, I'm sayin', for the Almighty God would take no child of mine in the holy life in settlement of an out-

standing account if 'twas the way she didn't want to go."

Patricia looked from one to the other, yet her thoughts were of neither. Back her mind had gone to that seat in the garden in Carrickbarrohane House, half-shyly, like a timid fawn that returns to a pool in the woods it has quenched its thirst from once before, half-anxiously, mixed not a little with defiance as she thought of the trick Charles Stuart had played on her, the exposure of which had been made by Sophie after the very next dance. She thought no ill of herself for the trick she had played on him. He stood accused before her, never she, in her consideration, before him.

It was to wreak his spite upon her, for the fool she had made of him, he had taken that mean advantage of her, and that was well consistent in her mind with a man who could ride his horse to death on a hard road and leave it with its broken heart by the side of the ditch. And what a mean advantage it had been! To pretend that his interests were so deep as, if it were, might have stirred some answering emotion in herself!

These thoughts startled her. Would it have aroused an answering emotion in her if his interest had been greater? No, she never meant that. No man cruel to his beast would ever succeed in stirring the faintest response from her. Yet there had been one thing he had said, as they stood out there on the Stradbally road, which had returned again and again to her thoughts.

"Some journeys have to be taken," he had said, "and when it's the choice between a man and a beast, it's left to sentimentalists to choose the beast."

Beside the whip of scorn there had been in that which, much against her will, she had felt stinging the blood to her cheeks, there was the conveyance of a motive in justifica-

tion of his apparent heartlessness. Whenever that consideration came to her, she put it away. Yet at this moment while she stood in silence before those two men waiting for her answer, it returned again as insistent as before.

Still, supposing there had been good reason for his treatment of his horse, there was above all other things his treatment of her. Then why had he shown such surprise and almost apparent distress when, not knowing she was Patricia, she had told him that that member of the Desmond family was dedicated to a convent life? Was that forced? Was that put on? She was inclined to think it was not. But what a splendid retaliation on her part it would be if when, one day, he came out to Waterpark, as he had said to Sophie he would, he found that the bird had flown and that no power of his hand could ever reach it in its splendid cage!

This, as near as one can touch it, is the mind of a girl of sixteen. The gaudiest flowers of romance are the ones that catch her eye, and she will pluck them, even if there is death in the lurking corners of their petals. There was all the color of romance to Patricia then—and, be it noticed, the desire for romance had in that night found its way into her heart. There was all the color of romance in this thought of his coming eager and hopeful to Waterpark, to find her gone, far and away beyond his reach.

"Well, what's yeer answer?" exclaimed her father impatiently at last, for though these thoughts fled with lightning feet through that little head of hers, the moments of delay seemed interminable to him. "Have ye got a vocation, or have ye not?"

She turned her eyes on him with all the innocence of a little child and she said:

"If ye've made yeer bargain with the Almighty God, 'tis

yourself must hold to it. Haven't I been brought up with the belief I'm going into a convent? Very well, so, into a convent I'll go, and just as soon as ye like to send me there."

And when you come to think of the lengths to which women will go to throw dust in the eyes of those who are already blind from their birth, you will realize the trueness to type in Patricia Desmond and all the charm that truth bestowed upon her.

VIII

A TAILPIECE

THERE is nothing but the power of the prince's right arm, the singing note of his sword, and the fearlessness in his heart, will break the spell cast upon the princess in the hour of her birth. Never was she set free by the wit or cunning of the king, her father, never could there be found in all his lands a wise man wise enough to triumph over true witchcraft.

And the true modern witchcraft is no less potent than the old. Every mother's son of us, we are all under some one spell or another, a prejudice or an imperative idea. Sometimes they call it the skeleton in our cupboard. And just as the princess gone to sleep for a hundred years, or that daughter of the king turned into the guise and likeness of a toad, there is only one thing can cut the chains of our slavery and set us free from the spell of prejudice or the witchcraft of evil thoughts. It is the sword of the prince, that glitter of white steel that cries its song aloud as he wields it about his head and plunges it into the very heart of the misshapen monster that holds us in its thrall.

A TAILPIECE

Patricia Desmond became the victim of the spell of an idea that very instant when her father, crying in his cups to the Lord God in the fear of losing his best beloved, had sworn to Mrs. Slattery that if his child should prove a girl he would offer her to the holy life.

Under the shadow of that spell, she grew towards womanhood—and here is the rest of the story yet to run.

If the flames burn low about that Christmas fire of ours, throw on another log. Another log will see us through.

BOOK VII

THE END OF THE STORY

"And for all I know, they may be wandering still."
Grimm's Fairy Tales.

I

THE DRAWING-ROOM AT WATERPARK

THERE is a saying putting it upon record that the entrance of hunger by the door is simultaneous with the departure of love by the window. Whether that be true or no—and it is not for a man capriciously to dispute because he happens to have lived a while with hunger and love in the same dwelling—it is, at least, never the first chapter in any story. For hunger, even if it be in the house already, could not hold the door if love were to set its shoulder against the panel, but according to the saying, one must take it for granted that love has got there first.

When love, then, comes to the door—and it cannot be supposed the house is empty—it is patience and all the attributes of common sense that fly in a flash out of the windows and never return again until such time as love has been settled down in her new abode and is in a fit state to receive visitors.

To say that Charles Stuart was impatient to see Patricia again after the dance at Stradbally would be as true as saying that a man died of a broken heart, when every ocular demonstration went to prove that he had cut his own throat rather than face his trouble.

He was brought back to Waterpark after the dance by friends of Mickey McNamara's who were going that way, but if in truth it can be said of a man that his heart was

in one place while the body of him is in another, this was the state of affairs with Charles Stuart.

For three days he fretted his spirit in that house in Lady Lane, until old Sandy, who had left love out of his reckoning, thought he must be sickening for a disease, and on the fourth, he set out for Portlaw.

It was a day in April when a man must thank God for life or be insensible to all the finer feelings of gratitude. The squadrons of the clouds were sweeping across the sky, their white sails too full of the winds of spring to pause for a thought of rain. Birds were building in the budding hedgerows. There was a nip and a warmth in the air at one and the same time, enough to tingle the blood and stir the sap in the woodland tree. Larks were heavenward. On such a day might Browning have been sitting in his window overlooking those waters of the Venetian canal and crying out with his heart towards England.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when, after many times losing his way, Charles pushed open the gate at the entrance of the drive and came under that long avenue of trees upon the wide grassland of Waterpark.

To one living in the town and in such cramped confinement as that narrow passage of Lady Lane, where, except for one hour of the day, the sun never shone, this great weather-slated house, with its broad outlook across the spreading fields, looked imposing enough. Only as he came nearer did Charles observe the broken stones up to the hall-door, the grass and moss growing thickly in the crevices; only when he pulled the bell and found himself falling backwards with three good yards of wire attached to the handle did he begin to realize that, imposing as it was, this was a poor man's dwelling. Assuming that there would be no response to that summons, however violent it may have

seemed, he knocked on the door, which any constant visitor to Waterpark could have told him was the only way to attract attention in that house. In the space of three minutes it brought Mrs. Slattery, when, such being the instinct of women, she knew the moment she beheld Charles's face and heard the uncertain stammer of his voice, that this was love knocking at the door. What more could she do than fling it wide to let him in?

"I've come," began Charles awkwardly—"to inquire after Miss—Miss Desmond, the one who had the accident the other night. I was at the dance at Stradbally. As a matter of fact, I forget her Christian name, but I helped carry her to the carriage and——" He stopped. This was not the sort of encounter he had much taste for. Indeed, his wits were as slow to the assistance of his tongue as in another issue they might have been swift in the service of his arm.

Mrs. Slattery looked down at him from the advantage of the higher level whereon she stood and wondered which of the remaining three girls it could be. Certainly it was not Margaret for whom he had inquired. In her experience, even so small a detail as a Christian name was not easily forgotten.

"Oh, she's much better," said she. "'Tis a wonder she was not much hurt and she with the hair all frizzled on her head. Is it Miss Sophie ye'd like to be seein'?"

He admitted he would like to see Miss Sophie—but not with conviction.

"There was Miss Josephine was somewhere about the house as well," she continued. He nodded his head. "But Miss Patricia is out," she added—"didn't I see her crossin' the fields with her dog."

"Oh!" said Charles, and no more, but enough to tighten a conviction in the heart of Mrs. Slattery, who found in

that moment she had not outgrown a quickening pulse or was insensible to the lively anticipation of romance. Some talk she had heard since that night of the dance in Stradbally, had told her of a young man they had encountered on the road and brought with them to Carrickbarrohane House. From Timothy it came to her ears that the stranger was carrying a loaded pistol, from Margaret that he had shot his horse on the roadside because Pat had told him to, from Sophie it must have been his first dance, for that he could not dance at all. But from Pat she had heard nothing, and therefore had placed him along with a host of others, in the same category as many a one she had heard talk of after the night of a dance. Yet this was the young man, no doubt, and Patricia was the one he wanted to see. Her little eyes swept his face with a shrewder glance, and when, even for her Patricia, she could discover nothing but of what she approved, there was a pain at her heart with the thought of the disappointment in store for him.

Patricia had chosen for herself the life of the convent, and her meeting with this young man had in no way served to alter her mind. There was a moment's agitation in Mrs. Slattery's conscience, when she wondered would it not be better to tell him then and there, to turn him from the door and send him back about his business, for that there was nothing short of disillusionment for his portion. What dissuaded her from that, it would be impossible to say. There is some occult vision in a woman which takes no heed of the sight of her eyes and ignores even the most conscious vision of her mind. It sees into the future through the strongest obstruction of all the most insurmountable barriers of life, and sets a course which many a man would tremble to pursue.

Such a vision as this may have come that moment to Mrs.

Slattery, for she flung open the door and bid Charles Stuart step in. He was not slow to obey. Indeed, so quick was he, feeling that now at last he was in the house where she lived, that he caught his foot in one of the holes in the mat, that had been brought back from the outhouse, and fell prostrate into the hall.

"Didn't I say 'twas no good havin' that mat put back again!" exclaimed Mrs. Slattery as she helped him to his feet. "There's the drawing-room in there," she added, and he walked into the vast chamber which, since the death of Mrs. Desmond, was never used by any one member of that household, unless on those exceptional occasions when ceremony was to be observed. But here was one of them when, with a somewhat magnificent swing of her fat arm, Mrs. Slattery ushered him into the lofty apartment.

There, for a quarter of an hour at least, listening to all those sounds overhead and in the passages which betoken in any house the fact that untoward things are happening for which the inmates are grievously unprepared, Charles waited, counting his chances of Patricia's return before it would be proper for him to leave.

During that period of his waiting he looked about him, not as one trained to observe, yet being made aware at every turn of the fallen fortunes of that house of Desmond. From various rusty curtain-poles hung curtains the sun had faded to a dull and negative tone. A three-legged table as he touched it fell with a guilty clatter to the floor, breaking —it must have been for the sixth time—a china dove that was standing on its dusty surface. With the blood rushing hot to his cheeks, accusing him once more of clumsiness, he set it to rights again, supporting the short leg on the book upon which it had been resting.

Everywhere there were photograph frames where there

was room for them to stand. But not one was secure in its support at the back. One of Patricia on horseback he picked up, and it took him at least five minutes, holding his breath like a juggler, to find its proper balance again. There were not holes in the carpet, but in places it was worn to the colorless threads where all signs of the pattern it once had had were irretrievably lost. The windows had not been cleaned that year. There were the drops of the winter's rains still spotted over their misty surfaces.

Without conscious observation, all these signs of a proud and accusing poverty were forced upon the mind of Charles Stuart as he waited alone in the drawing-room at Waterpark.

With a breath drawn deep upon the thought of all the luxuries he could give Patricia if he might, he turned from the window, when his eye fell upon the large grand-piano across which, with the taste he had heard she had for music, he knew Patricia's fingers must often have passed.

With its long mahogany case and standing firmly upon its well-carved legs, it was the only impressive piece of furniture in the room. Thinking, perhaps, of her fingers on the keys—for when in love, to what lengths will the mind of a young man not go to establish that touch of affinity which is the motive power of all he does?—he crossed the room to it and lifted the board. There were the keys, stained and yellow. But her fingers had touched them, and with his own he touched them too. With a gentleness of apprehension, he struck a note, and then another, and then a third.

There was not a sound in the whole instrument. The keys were dead. The strings were broken. There it stood in all its hollow and silent grandeur, the deepest note of poverty of all.

He shut down the lid and turned away, and at that moment Sophie Desmond, in a pink dressing-jacket, came into the room.

II

A MEETING

TO explain the meaning of a pink dressing-jacket at four o'clock in the afternoon was the work of a moment, and would have been vouchsafed to any man with less confusion in his face than Sophie was quick to see in Charles Stuart's then. She and Josephine had been washing their hair. Hence the delay, hence, indeed, that pattering of feet in the passage overhead. They had never expected a visitor—least of all, one so welcome as he.

Sophie, indeed, knew nothing of those conversations that had taken place between Patricia and himself on that seat in the garden at Stradbally. She was the eldest and, as many said, the best-looking of the whole of that family. It was in the nature of a perquisite, due to her age, that all such visitors were assumed, at least until proved to the contrary, to have come to the house in her interest.

It had been necessary while upstairs, scrubbing their hair with towels during that quarter of an hour, to remind Josephine of this.

"Ye can come downstairs in half an hour," said Sophie —"when ye're ready, and there's no need to be dressin' yeerself up. Amn't I goin' down to him in this old jacket of a thing, with the hair half done on me and I lookin' a fright-the-world. Ye can put on the green linen thing ye have."

With these injunctions, Sophie had left her, having taken such precautions against invidious comparison as most other women would have done under the circumstances.

As a matter of fact, the pink dressing-jacket was no source of envy to her. One and all of them, those girls were prepared to be taken as men found them. She marched into the drawing-room that afternoon with this incongruous garment on her back, far less concerned about its inappropriateness than if she had been wearing a frock in the height of fashion.

"I've been washing me hair," said she when she saw that look of astonishment in his face. "Feel that," and she shook her hair down over her shoulders, which is permissible enough when a woman has hair to be proud of. Hers was beautiful enough, but as he touched it timidly with his hand, Charles Stuart thought of the coal-blackness of Patricia's, and the moment left him unmoved.

In a lively fashion she entertained him till Mrs. Slattery brought in tea with griddle-cakes of her especial making, always ordered on those days when hair was washed and dried at the kitchen fire.

"Josephine 'll be down in a few minutes," said she as the tray was laid before her. "She's makin' herself look grand upstairs now, the way she wouldn't be seen in her dressing-jacket, not if she had a string of pearls to cover her bare neck. Shure, what harm is there in a dressing-jacket?"

Mrs. Slattery turned her back—ample concealment for the smile that spread with increasing breadth across her face—and walked to the door.

"And where's Miss—Miss Patricia?" asked Charles.

At the door Mrs. Slattery stopped. There was dust on the side of the piano—indeed, there was dust all over it—

and, lifting her apron, she took no little trouble in wiping it off.

"That child!" said Sophie.

Mrs. Slattery expended the burst of her anger upon a spot of grease on the surface of the piano and rubbed it viciously off with her apron.

"Oh, shure, she's playin' about in the fields. Annything will please that child."

"Is it true that she's going into a convent?" he inquired.

"Next month," said Sophie. "Shure, she came back from the dance the other night, she sayin' the world was a quare place, and the sooner she was out of it the better."

Much as she would have liked to hear the rest of that conversation, there fell a sound on Mrs. Slattery's ears that brought her quickly to the door and filled the eyes of Sophie with a swift apprehension. The hall-door had banged heavily in the warm stillness of that April afternoon, and there followed the sound of heavy footsteps outside. In a moment Mrs. Slattery had gone, the drawing-room door had closed softly behind her, for a moment there was a noise of voices, and then all was silent once more. With a note less confident in her voice, Sophie swept hurriedly into the conversation again, and when a moment later Josephine entered the room, beckoned to her sister to come and speak to her, Charles was aware that something of a troublesome nature was in the air.

Their sister Margaret might be worse. It was the first ready supposition that came to his mind, and he stood looking out of the window while they talked in whispers by the door. Whatever it was, nothing apparently was going to be done about it then, for Josephine came forward a moment later and shook hands with him as though nothing

had happened, and they all sat down again to the consumption of the griddle-cakes.

But something undoubtedly was to be feared, for now all the liveliness had vanished from the heart of Sophie's manner, and every moment Josephine rose from her seat, went to the door and opened it, listening a while to sounds in the house, and when apparently satisfied came back again.

Charles ventured his fear that Margaret was no better, but they both assured him she was so well the doctor had said she might get up the next day. That evidently was not in their concern, but it was not long before he was enlightened.

There came the sound of those heavy footsteps again across the hall. Charles could not fail to see the glances of apprehension, flying like frightened birds in a summer storm, between those two girls seated before him. It was a strange house he had come to. That had been plain enough to him in the quarter of an hour during which he had waited for Sophie's arrival in her pink dressing-jacket. But all these mysterious glances and all these unaccountable sounds were making it stranger still. And then the drawing-room door opened, when he saw the tall figure of a man, to him a complete stranger, who swayed into the room and stood there, holding on to the end of the piano while he gathered the meaning of their little tea-party into his bemuddled wits.

From the moment that Patricia had given her answer to Father Casey, John Desmond had ceased to care.

"Shure, what the divvle's the harm," he had said to Mrs. Slattery, "if I'm drunk all day? I'm being kept to me bargain, and what call is there for a man to hold to his word once 'tis broken? There niver was the likin's in me for pieces of things. I'd have the whole or none at all.

And shure, if a' be I can't kape whole sober, I may as well be whole drunk."

And from that day onwards whole drunk he was. From knowing that once it had been his habit to sit through the evening and far on into the night, drinking alone in the dining-room when all of them had gone to bed, long before he was in that condition unfit to be seen, the girls now beheld him unsteady in his gait and violent in his tempers by twelve o'clock in the day. As yet they were not used to it, and had been trembling that afternoon in fear of his coming from the moment they had heard him enter the hall-door. Now the matter was no longer to be avoided. There he stood—a fine-looking man at that age, even in his cups—with his eyes swimming, labored, in a sea of muddled speculation.

Tea in the drawing-room! And a young man sitting there whom he had never seen before in his life, sitting there talking to his daughters, moreover, as though he might be one of the family, when, so far as he could remember in the scattered collection of his wits, there was no such person whom he was prepared to accept in that capacity!

"Good-day to ye," said he thickly.

"How do you do," said Charles, and rose uncertainly to his feet.

The next moment Sophie had come to her father's side and was begging him to leave the room. It was the most natural action in the world, but under the circumstances the worst she could have done. From the preparation of his mind to tolerate this stranger in his house and accept his intentions, if they were worthy, his attitude was changed to one of swift suspicion.

He was asked to leave the room, was he? Well, there was a proper and definite answer to that. He closed the

door with a resounding noise and came down to the table, looking first at that unaccustomed sight of tea-things laid out as daintily as Mrs. Slattery could arrange them, and then at Charles Stuart, as though the one and the other were intimately connected.

"Ye're havin' a cup of tay," said he, putting his glances straightway into words.

"That's right," said Charles.

"'Tis the first time in tin years," he went on, "I seen this room puttin' on a show of daicency, with young ladies in pink and green and young gintlemin settin' on chairs the way they'd be makin' smart things of themselves at Dublin Castle. 'Tis a grand sight indeed," said he, and adding a touch of magnificence to his irony, he stook back the better to look at them, when that same three-legged table came in his way and, for the second time that afternoon, clattered with a fine rattle to the ground.

This merciful interruption went far to saving the painful delicacy of the situation. Charles hastened to set the table on its feet again, knowing by now the use of the book that supported it. But the two wretched girls seated there went hot to their cheeks with shame. John Desmond looked down at them while the table was being put to rights, and into his bemused senses there struggled the impression that they were ashamed. The color of their cheeks alone betrayed them. But there was nothing to be ashamed about. He knew well enough what he was doing. Why should be be denied those glorious moments when everything in life was so exquisitely ludicrous, when even the thought of his Patricia going next month into a convent made him smile as he pictured the dance she would lead those simple-hearted old women in their coifs and veils?

He nodded down to Sophie, however, with a reassuring

twinkle in his eyes, as if he might say: "'Tis all right—'tis all right. I know I'm drunk, but I'll let on I'm as sober as a judge in the courts." Which is no doubt what he would have said, and fully intended by that confiding glance in his eye. Nevertheless it had no power to console them, for even the sight of Sophie sitting there, trembling in her pink dressing-jacket—Sophie, whom he imagined preening herself in the delight of tea in the drawing-room—appealed to the acuter sense of his humor in that mood. He was half-laughing as Charles rose to his feet.

"Thank ye," said John Desmond, offering him a grand salute which nearly cost him his balance.

"It's a pleasure," said Charles, and now there was a tremor at the corner of his lips and a twinkle in his eye as well. For he had seen men drunk the world over, and knew by now the value they stamped upon themselves in such a predicament. It is, indeed, the truth of himself that comes out of a man when he passes the borderline of sobriety. In a moment you will know the man of sulks, the soul of eloquence, or the secretive mind. Not many there are can stand the test of the witch's philter that strips the soul of all the polish and veneer, few indeed as John Desmond could. For even Father Casey had a secret admiration for him then, and to Charles Stuart, making allowance for the painfulness of his presence there before his own daughters—seeing that the niceties of judgment cannot be expected of a man in such a pass—there was a grand simplicity about his nature which none but a fool or a prude could have failed to see.

"It's a pleasure," said he again, and meant it, at which their eyes met, when they smiled as two men will when one is drunk and the other sober. On each side it is a smile of comprehension, and conveys a spirit of confidence to both.

John Desmond looked him up and down, and came to a swift impression of approval. Whatever his purpose was in that room, sitting like an old woman over a cup of tea, he liked the frank looks of him, the straight limbs, the square shoulders, and the clear brown eye. Above all, he took to him for that smile, and with a big stride in Charles's direction, he came forward holding out his hand.

"I don't know who the hell ye are," said he, "but ye're welcome to the house, and there's better than that stuff ye've got in yeer cup in the other room."

"Oh, father!" exclaimed Sophie in her agony.

He held up a reassuring hand.

"Oh, don't fret yeerself," said he coaxingly. "I won't take himself away from ye, if 'tis the way he would like to sit here at the party. Yirra, glory be to God!" he looked round the room, "'tis tin years since this room had the makin's of an entertainment to shake the dust out of the curtains, and begorra, it shan't be the last. Won't I give a dance here meself the time Pat'll be goin' into the convent, the way she can say good-bye to the world with the fiddles playin' and the carpet up and she hoppin' and turnin' it with the best of them."

At the engaging thought of it, he began dancing a jig then and there in the center of the drawing-room, swaying from side to side as he executed the steps he had learned in his youth and which no Irishman ever grows old enough to forget.

There he danced, and not one of them in that room had the power or spirit to stop him. There he danced, humming a woeful tune to himself as he shuffled his feet, never hearing the door open behind him or seeing the figure of Patricia as she stood there a moment, silent in the shame that was upon her.

"Father!" she exclaimed at last.

He came at that to an unsteady end of his movements and turned, looking into her face.

"What is it, Pat?" said he.

"You're drunk," said she.

"I am indeed," he replied.

She stood there with her lip trembling to tears, and when, in obedience to the look in her eyes, he walked slowly out of the room, she followed him, closing the door behind her.

III

A PARTING

THE heart of Charles Stuart sank like a stone in a deep water. She had come. He had seen her, and she had never so much as greeted him or shown one instant's recognition of his presence in that room. And a thousand times more, with the inevitable comparison he must have made between the power of her personality and that of her sister Sophie, a thousand times more was he caught up in admiration and swept into the warmer atmosphere of an absorbing emotion.

To remain there in that room talking to her sisters after she had gone, and there seemed no hope of seeing her again, was more than, in that state of mind, he could bring himself to do. As soon as was consistent with respect, and lest it might seem he was leaving because of the unfortunate event of that afternoon, he rose to his feet to take his departure.

"I've nine miles to walk back to Waterford," said he,

making his excuses. "I think I ought to be starting back now."

They let him go without protest, when at any other time no appeal could have been too importunate to make him stay. In her pink dressing-jacket, and with eyes casting to right and left of her in fear of her father's return, Sophie came with him to the hall-door, and surely, had she been able to make his heart beat a pulse the faster, it would have done so then. All her high spirits had left her, and still believing he had walked all those miles to see herself again, it was with a pathetic depression at her heart she let him go.

"He'll never come back again," she said to herself—"he'll never come back again after this," and she closed the door as he set foot on the last step, fondly imagining she was shutting out the spirit of romance that is so timid in those early days of its waking.

Charles Stuart walked slowly down the grass-grown gravel drive, thinking, no less than she, that the first romance and what, in that mood, he imagined would be the last in his life had died at birth. For not only had Patricia passed him over in that room, but in that brief half-hour of his visit he had learned that, in less than a month's time, she would have left the world for the unapproachable life of the convent. Nothing that had passed between them that night in the garden at Carrickbarrohane House had had the power to change her mind. Indeed, so far from changing it, it had only added acceleration to her intent. Then he had learned she was becoming a nun in a year's time. Now it was but a month.

He fell to wondering what sort of fate it was that had brought him back those thousands of miles to teach him this new wonder in life, and then deny him an expression

for all the uplifting impulses it brought. Something he imagined must be wrong with the world when it could treat a man in so harsh a manner as that. For while under the influence of this most urgent passion of all, youth believes greatly, so also does it greatly despair.

The prince of fairy tales is he who fights with the stoutest heart of all when there is fighting to be done, and when there is none, is to be found seated, broken-hearted, by the side of the king's highway, knowing not which way to turn or where in life he can find the substance to risk his sword upon.

It is then that the old woman comes to his aid, pointing out the true way to that heart of his, tired with all its wanderings. It was then, indeed, that the old woman, in no greater disguise than a common tinker begging his days through, came to Charles Stuart.

Up the drive from under the trees he approached with his toes sticking out of his boots, his trousers in rags, too short to hide the fact that there was only one stocking to his wardrobe. A smear of blood and dirt was down one cheek where his woman had struck him the night before, and wrapped in a dirty piece of sack-cloth he carried a bundle under his arm.

" 'Tis a fine day, captain!" said he, stopping in the drive.

Charles admitted the statement, but denied the rank.

"Ah, shure, what's a name?" said the man. " 'Tis the looks of a man is better than his title. 'Tis the looks I go by," and he filled his eyes with admiration as he looked Charles Stuart up and down. Fast on that he asked him for a crust of bread.

It is always well when asking alms to beg for what a man can never give you; moreover, it must be something, too, you do not want yourself. In pity, then, for your

simple needs which he cannot supply, he is a thousand times more likely to give you what he can.

Charles Stuart had no bread he carried with him, but the tinker had heard the jingle of money in his pocket as he walked.

"Shure, the business is very bad," said he.

"What is the business?" asked Charles.

For answer, the tinker laid his bundle down upon the ground, undid the knot that kept it and displayed the motley garments of a jester at a fair.

"I'm a clown, yeer honor," said he, and in the most despondent voice in the world. "Shure, I does the clowning round all the fairs in the county of Waterford and I makes jokes for the gintry too. I won't put on the clothes now—there's a lady just gone by this way, and I'd have to take me trousers off to get into these things, but if yeer honor 'll stand there for the whisk of a cow's tail I'll tell ye a good wan. 'Tis a real good wan, but I can't tell it before the ladies—'tis not dacint. There was a man was married down in Lisfunshion——"

He got no farther with his story than that. Too concerned with other thoughts to be sick at the sight of that leering expression of vulgar humor that had come into the old reprobate's face, Charles asked what lady it was he had seen go by, how she was dressed, and what she was like.

" 'Twas dark she was," said the tinker, "with black hair, and seein' the tears was tumblin' down her cheeks, I said no more than the time of day to her. When a woman's cryin'," said he, "she can think of nothin' else. 'Twas no good tellin' a tale to her."

"Which way did she go?"

The tinker pointed through the trees, and, waiting only so long as to fetch a sixpence out of his pocket, which he

threw on the ground, Charles left him and made his way through the trees to where a shaft of sunlight, falling slantwise in the pool, guided him on into the denser thicket of the wood.

In places there were clearings where patches of primroses were spread like praying-mats in those sunny courtyards of that temple of the woods. And there, in one of these, by the side of a stream that still ran brown in the valley from the peatland in the hills, he found Patricia seated on the limb of a tree, with head raised and eyes questioning the sounds of his approach.

When she saw who it was, the blood came swift into her cheeks. They were as when the sun strikes a pine stem, hot with a warmth and ruddy glow. Palpably enough, she was uncertain what to do, and as he came nearer, rose to her feet. He felt, in the solitude of that place, like a hunter coming up with a timid fawn, whose tracks he has followed one mile upon another, never seeing her till then. At the slightest unexpected sound, she might take to the lightning of her heels once more, when she would never permit so close an approach again. So he came, creeping almost, fearful even, it seemed to him, of the cracking twigs beneath his feet.

Yet in such experience as he had had, there was little need to regard her on the count of timidity. She had shown none of it on the Stradbally road, and no more in the garden at Carrickbarrohane, while only half an hour ago, there she had been in that drawing-room, proving a higher spirit than either of her more timid sisters.

Nevertheless, the instinct was true in him, as true as when the hunter pauses at a veering breath of wind that blows of a sudden in the direction of the quarry he pursues. For timid every girl must be when love, the hunter, first comes

tracking in her steps. And swift enough she knows the sounds of the chase in her heart, when that noise of the brushwood breaking at the fall of a stealthy tread comes nearer and nearer with every quickening pulse in her veins.

It was with the instinct of his sex, and scarcely rising to his conscious mind, that Charles Stuart came warily, expecting every moment she would start in flight, when a look in her eyes and a word on her lips would give him his dismissal.

"I wanted to see you," he began quietly, "and they told me you had come this way."

"Who told ye?"

"A tinker's man I met in the drive."

"Mightn't he have minded his own business?" said she.

"He would if I'd told him," replied Charles. "Does that mean you'd rather I hadn't come?"

She turned to the stream to avoid an answer, then asked him what it was he wanted to see her for.

"Didn't you know it was me in the house just now?" said he.

"I did, of course," she replied.

"Well, why didn't you speak?"

She looked at him, puzzled at his want of comprehension. Was he incapable of realizing the shame she had felt? She said as much, and inquired what sort of a girl he might think her.

"You were ashamed at what I must think?" said he.

"I was, of course," she cried, "and ye comin' to the house for the first time!"

"Well, you see, I've been about the world," he answered her. " 'Tis not the first time I've seen a man—like that."

"And wouldn't it make a shame in ye to be a man!" she

cried again, hot in the contempt of youth, and as intolerant.

"I'd be satisfied enough," said he, "if I could take my drink like your father."

"If ye took it as often," she gave him back, " 'twould be a poor sort of man ye'd be, and shure, I'd not be speakin' to ye now."

She looked at him with her eyes flashing, in fact, he was making her speak but poorly of the man she loved best, and hated most, at that moment, in all the world.

"Is it comin' out here ye were," said she, "and ye follow'in' me to tell me this?"

He shook his head.

"I wanted to ask you a question."

"What is it?"

He pulled at a button on his coat, a trick he had got from his father, the balance of whose wits was sometimes dependent upon a single cotton thread.

"I want to know if it's true," he said slowly, "that you're going into a convent next month."

"Who told ye that?" she asked.

"Your sister Sophie."

"I suppose 'twas out to see her ye came?" said she. He shook his head again.

"Yirra, what did ye walk that nine miles for, then?"

"To see you."

He said it with the simplicity of confession you will find in a child when the unavoidable question is put to it and equivocation is no longer possible. He was as far from artfulness as a lover as when he fought, for not only is all fair, but all is the same, in love as in war. As a man fights, so he loves, and if he will take a mean advantage in the one, so you may be sure he will in the other.

"To see you," said he, and so direct was that answer that

it brought her to silence, though there were voices shouting tumult in her heart.

"Well, you haven't answered my question," he went on. "Is it true?"

There was more than one way in which she could tell him how true it was, and the thought of that trick he had played upon her that night, coming uninvited to her mind, the remembrance as well of the scene he had just witnessed in the house accompanying it, she gave him her answer in the very way, perhaps, she least intended.

"'Tis as true as anything ye've ever heard," said she abruptly, at which, being as timid a beginner at the chase as she was in pursuit, he straightway raised his hat and turned away into the wood.

She heard the brushwood crackling as he went. She heard still more the silence when he had gone, and then, lying flat upon her face, she stared into a deep brown pool in the stream where a trout was swinging its tail in the twisting current, yet saw nothing and heard no more than the heavy beating of her heart.

IV

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HAT AND A CROWN

WHATEVER may have been his word in the moment of intoxication, John Desmond kept to it when sober. On the night before Patricia's departure into the convent, he had said he would give a dance, and though with large debts outstanding to countless tradesmen in Waterford, and little enough left in the house out of that sale of the mare to Tim Cassidy, a dance he gave.

The dancing-room was stripped, the dining-room was cleared. Never had Mrs. Slattery worked so hard in her life before. One and all the girls were on their knees, working and polishing, cooking and decorating, from sunrise in the morning till sunset at night.

John Desmond, coming round in the afternoon, had stared in amazement at the transformation.

"'Tis a damned fine house," said he, "when the carpets are up and the furniture's got out of it."

A piano had been hired, and two violinists were engaged out of Waterford who would play till daybreak if they had sufficient drink to keep them standing.

"I've seen to that," said John Desmond. "Whin ye fall down 'twill not be from fatigue."

He went about Waterford all that morning with long lists on pieces of paper, compiled for him by Mrs. Slattery and Sophie overnight.

"'Tis me daughter is going into a convent tomorrow," said he, whenever he came to a tradesman with whom his account was long overdue.

"Shure, ye wouldn't send yeer own daughter off without givin' a bit of a party for her. "I'll send ye a little on account tomorrow or the next day. Isn't she sixteen and the sweetest thing ever ye saw in yeer life?"

There was not one of them had a thought of settlement. They would send anything he wanted. There was the shop and there were its contents. He could order anything he liked. He came driving back to Waterpark with a trapful, singing as though he had paid for the lot. Indeed, with the way he had, they had been obtained nearly as easily as paying for them.

With regard to the invitations, they asked whom they liked. A fortnight before there had been a solemn meeting

in the kitchen, presided over in a judicial capacity by Mrs. Slattery, when all the names under proposal were put up to the general vote. All were suggested by Sophie, and when it came to the name of Charles Stuart, he was voted out, Patricia making no comment on that matter, but turning away—it was Mrs. Slattery who observed her—and looking out of the kitchen window.

"Shure, why wouldn't ye have him?" inquired Mrs. Slattery. "Isn't he the nicest fella I seen comin' up to the door since ye put up yeer hair, Miss Sophie?"

But after what had happened that afternoon, nothing on earth, they said, could induce them to change their ruling.

"He wouldn't accept," said Sophie, "so what's the good! I know by the way he left that afternoon. Father ought to have been ashamed of himself."

At that Patricia had turned round.

"There's no man," she said, "can take his drink and be a gentleman like father can!"

They held up their hands in pretended horror. 'Twas a fine nun she'd make, they said, with sentiments like that.

When Sophie read out the names to John Desmond that evening, he asked which was the young man he had met that afternoon in the drawing-room.

"We're not asking him," she replied.

"An' why not?" said he.

She feared her father more than Patricia, but she told him the truth.

"'Tis no good asking him," she added, "he wouldn't come."

"Yirra, that be damned for a tale!" he shouted. "Shure, glory be to God, don't I know a man when I see him!"

If he did not remember Charles's name, at least there

had not gone out of his mind that which had passed between them.

"Begorra," said he, "if 'tis the way ye think I made a fool of meself, won't I write the invitation to him with me own hand." And then, with a shrewd glance, he looked up at her. "D'ye want to lose him without a kick in ye?" said he.

"Shure, I don't know that I ever had him," she replied.

He tossed back his head at that and told her in a few trenchant sentences what he knew of men.

" 'Tis neither nine miles nor nine yards a man will walk," said he, "to do his duty to a woman, if a' be he hasn't got his heart in it. Ah, shure, don't talk to me about his comin' all those ways out of Waterford to pay his respects to ye. There's little respect a young man has for a woman whin his heart doesn't give it to him."

He wrote the letter himself, refusing all apology, he said, for that little misadventure which had occurred when last he came to Waterpark.

"If I thought you wanted apologies," his letter concluded, "I should not be writing to you at all."

By the next post, Charles sent his acceptance, and when they told Patricia he was coming, there was scarlet she could not keep out of her cheeks, when, but for the well-timed intervention of Mrs. Slattery, she would have been the laughing-stock of them all.

The night before the dance John Desmond came into the kitchen and made his punch with the kettle coming straight off the hob. He drank heavily that night, and what was worse, to Mrs. Slattery's amazement, he sat there reading the "Irish Melodies" as well.

If anything could be read by such signs as these, it was that his punch could not lift the weight of depression from

his mind. Another night was to follow, and then the next day his Pat would be gone. He himself was going to drive her to the little branch convent at Rathgormuck, and that same evening she was to be taken by the nuns in their ramshackle, closed-in conveyance to the Reverend Mother at Clonmel.

Till midnight he sat at the kitchen table, disposing of one glass after another, furiously smoking his pipe and bending his head deeply over that book of poems.

Coming into the kitchen at the end of her long day, Mrs. Slattery had stood a moment watching him, with as much pity in her heart as ever she had felt for a man in her life.

"What would ye do," she asked suddenly—"what would ye do if some young fella proposed himself to Miss Pat tomorrow night?"

"By God!" said he, standing up as if her hand had struck him, "I'd put him down in the book of saints, and I'd have a halo screwed on to his head."

" 'Twould be better for herself," said Mrs. Slattery, "if he wore a hat."

V

WHEN JOHN DESMOND GIVES ADVICE

IT was part of Mrs. Slattery's reward for service done that she was allowed to station herself at the hall-door and show the guests, as they came, to their respective dressing-rooms.

Eyes she had, and bigger than they had ever been before, for all the dresses that were picked up that evening over many a pair of ankles and only let down again when the

safety of the hall was reached. But fast as they came and admiringly as she looked at them, there was ever a further expectation in her eyes. At the sound of the wheels of yet another carriage, she would peer out into the darkness to see who it was, and when Charles Stuart jumped off the outside-car that had brought him from Waterford, her feet began moving under that round tub of a skirt that encased them, for all the world as if she suffered the impatience of a child.

When Patricia had dressed herself in the new frock which, true to his word, John Desmond had bought for her out of the profit on the mare, she had come down to the kitchen for this good woman's inspection. Straightening a bow here and settling a fold of the skirt there, the poor creature had suddenly burst into tears and caught Patricia in the wild passion of an embrace.

"I won't ruffle ye," she sobbed, "or if I do, shure I'll set ye straight again. But I must hold ye in me arms this night, for aren't ye the loveliest thing entirely, and wouldn't I go crazed, if I were a young fella, to think ye'd be cutting off all that lovely hair and hidin' that face ye have, the way we'd be lookin' at ye through a hole in the door."

Patricia loosened the arms that held her, and infectious though crying is to the imitative nature of her sex, she steeled her heart and set her lips and looked more like John Desmond than ever.

"What young fella would there be?" said she, at that moment, too, with no little trace of her father's cunning. "Shure, what young fella would there be lookin' at me one way or another? Faith, I had no partners at all at Stradbally, and who'd be wantin' to dance with a girl has got a vocation and is goin' into a convent the very next day?"

"Shure, glory be, 'tis that'll 'tice 'em," cried Mrs. Slattery. "Doesn't the world know a man 'ud be lookin' with both eyes at the thing he can't have, the way he'd be fallin' over the thing he's got and he not seeing it."

"I shall be leanin' up against the wall," said Pat.

"Ye will," said Mrs. Slattery, "to get yeer breath from all the fellas dancin' with ye."

But there was only one that anxious woman's heart was set upon that he might ask her. And there were the fiddles already tuning up and the piano striking their notes twenty times over to help them do it, without a sign of that one coming. However, he came at last, but only when Patricia was already surrounded and again and again, under Mrs. Slattery's observant eye, had written a name down on her program.

"There's the gintlemen's dressin'-room in there," said she, before Charles had so much as set his foot upon the top step, and just as he was thanking her for the information, some impulse seized her. She stood on the tips of her toes—which even with that contriving brought her no higher than his shoulder—and she whispered one word.

"Hurry!" said she.

He looked down at her and smiled, but with more bewilderment than amusement in his face.

"What for?" he asked.

"Ye're late," said she.

"Wasn't it for nine o'clock?" he inquired, still at a loss.

"Ah, don't talk!" she exclaimed. "Hurry!" And saying no more, she just cast her eyes to where Patricia stood at the top of the stairs with three young men about her begging for her program.

Whether that was what she meant, he did not wait to think, but was gone on the moment to throw his hat and

coat to the man who, when this story first set out, was that same boy riding for the doctor.

Within two minutes he was up those stairs, those eyes of Mrs. Slattery's speeding after him.

"Am I too late for a dance?" he asked Patricia.

She showed him her program, a column of names, and John Desmond's there as large as life across two items in the middle. There was not one space left for Charles in which to write his own.

"You're filled it up very quick," said he in a voice that was odd even to his hearing.

"'Tis my dance," said she, "and they're bein' very kind to me."

He returned her program, just bent his head and walked away. It was only Mrs. Slattery who saw her look that followed him. In her excitement, she directed three young women to the gentlemen's dressing-room.

This had been his last chance, and to Charles it seemed that it had gone. The next day she would be out of his reach and, so far as he knew, having regard for the sanctity of the convent life, for ever. He found his way to an empty room, designed for couples sitting out, but too early in the evening as yet to be occupied. There he walked, up and down, up and down, with his mind alternating between the despair of what it seemed he had lost and the clinging of youth to the hope of what he yet might win.

A thousand times he told himself he had faced and come through situations blacker of outlook than was this. But by now he was brought to the conclusion that no adventure was quite the same as love.

Finesse it needed with all the subtle delicacy of force and more of shrewdness, it seemed, than he had wit to give

it. No such methods as he had used on the Stradbally road with those pressing customers would serve him here. So flimsy a matter as a piece of cardboard with a column of names scribbled in pencil stood between them both, of which, if it were merely a question of tearing it in pieces, the solution were simple enough, and no man's hand in the house that night would have been strong enough to keep it from him. But holding it in the lightest grip of her fingers, she had it more safe than if a regiment of men were guarding it.

There was no way out, and the difficulty was the more galling to his spirits because of its littleness. It appeared there was nothing to be done but to fulfill his duties as a casual guest. He turned and went downstairs, and in the hall he met his host.

"Ah, there's the man," said John Desmond, and found a grip of the hand as strong as his own. "Ye're welcome to the house," said he, "and before ye lay a hand on one of these beautiful creatures, ye're to come along to the supper-room and have a drink with me."

Had Charles the wish, there was no gainsaying him. He was drawn along by the arm, and, the first dance having just began, the supper-room was empty.

"There's going to be no talk about that afternoon," said John Desmond, handing him his glass. "There are more things make a man take his drop than the want of it. If ye don't know that—and mind ye, I think ye do—there's the whole world to learn it in."

"Well, there's not much of it I haven't seen one way and another," said Charles.

John Desmond laid down his glass, already in that amiable condition of mind when the shaking of hands is more expressive of friendship than any writing of words.

"Here's more power to ye," said he as he lifted his glass again, and when that was empty filled it up to the brim once more.

There are stages of intoxication as plain to be seen as your hand before your face in one who is young to his cups. With the hard drinker, they seem to merge one into the other, when only the practiced eye, with an intimate knowledge of his man, can mark their passage. One of the fits of these stages is that warm sensation of confidence in human nature—such weight of confidence as no experience could support. This is the most deceiving of all. In the first flash of it, an unwary man will unburden the inmost secrets of his soul to the merest acquaintance, and live to regret it all his life. He who has learned wisdom will choose his company and keep a guard upon himself until the hour is passed.

It was not to be supposed that John Desmond would keep sober with such a party in progress as they were having that night at Waterpark. There were, moreover, as he had said, more things than the want of it pressing upon his mind, and to all the inmates of that house it was little less than a matter of how long he would keep himself with dignity upon his feet.

At that moment when he led Charles Stuart by the arm into the empty supper-room, he was in process of that phase of confidence, desiring nothing better than to unburden his mind. With a solid foundation of experience, however, he chose his confidant with a shrewd knowledge of men, remembering, if nothing else, the look he had seen in Charles Stuart's eye on that misadventurous afternoon when Patricia had driven him from the room.

Leaning now upon his elbows, that rested on the table, he looked once more and closely into Charles Stuart's eyes,

when, as if thoroughly satisfied with what he found there, he touched his arm.

"Have ye got yeer dances with Sophie?" said he.

Charles brought out his program, showing him the empty card with a laugh. John Desmond heard the bitterness in it and, with a swift return of his mind to his own youth, knew what it meant.

"Were ye late?" he inquired.

"I suppose I was. In the letter you wrote me you said it began at nine o'clock. I was here on the stroke. Being a stranger more or less, I didn't like——"

"Yirra, glory be to God, man, ye must have been out of this country a long while. Shure, the invitation says nine till twelve, which means as soon as ye can get here and as long as yeer feet'll bear ye. There were some of thim fellas, known' the ropes, were here soon afther eight, the way they could be gettin' the girls to give 'em dances while there was room for the spot of a pencil on their programs. Wasn't there Sophie was ready in her dress by half-past seven, and she peepin' out through the curtains to see who would be comin'. Shure, I suppose I oughtn't to be tellin' ye that, but the world's the world, and women'll be peepin' out of chinks in heaven, the way they can be lookin' at a man without his seein' 'em."

This was sound advice and such as Charles had much need of, but was no help to him one way or another then. John Desmond watched the expression on his face as he listened, knowing that somehow he had not got the right hang of the matter, at which, with a warm rush of that impulse of confidence, he suddenly lowered his voice to a similar note as when he made his rare confessions to Father Casey in the confessional.

"If ye want to get yeer dance with Sophie," said he,

"and will have my advice, ye'll put no pass on her whin she says her program is full. She's probably written half a dozen dances down herself, the way she could be savin' up her dances for thim she wants 'em with. Stick to it, man, and say ye've got to have wan. From all accounts, ye can rough and tumble it when 'tis the knives are out and a man needs some guts in him to be holdin' his own, but ye're as timid as a hare with the women."

"Where's the good of being anything else?" said Charles. "Force is no good. It 'ud only frighten 'em."

John Desmond looked at him closely, then drew back his head and set to laughing as though he had been listening to the comic innocence of a child.

"There's a lot ye'll have to learn before ye're a match for Miss Sophie," said he. "Shure, the only way a man is stronger than a woman is with his arm. Wasn't that wife of mine a little delicate thing, was lighter than a feather, and wasn't she the only body had the power to keep me off the drink? Couldn't she do just what she liked with me, and wasn't she gettin' the way she'd order me about the house, and she jumpin' down me throat if I so much as opened me mouth? She was indeed. If I hadn't liked the feelin' of her in me throat, I wouldn't have stood it as long as I did, and yirra, didn't it get too much for me after a while? By God, there she was, gettin' the way she thought she could do what she liked, and she a meek little thing would be lookin' for burglars under her bed every night before she went to sleep."

"What did you do?" said Charles.

"What did I do?" He held out a large hand, and there for a moment in silence they both looked at it. "I showed her that," said he, "and I told her that if the weight of it ever fell across the side of her dainty little head, she wouldn't

get up for a week, and there'd be a buzzin' in her head for a fortnight. 'I'd think better of ye if ye did,' says she. 'Ye'd better start thinkin' that now,' says I, 'for 'tis hard to be thinkin' at all with a sick headache.' Just that," he concluded, with a nod of his head, "but shure, it made the hell of a difference. Mind ye, I described most amiably what it 'ud feel like. And didn't she go and tell that good woman we have, that Mrs. Slattery, all about it? 'Twas herself told me afther me poor wife was dead. 'What did she say?' said I. 'She'd been tryin' to get you to do it for two years,' says Mrs. Slattery to me, 'and 'twas the way she was beginnin' to think ye hadn't the strength to hold a baby in yeer arms.' Now what do ye think of that, now?"

Charles thought a great deal, and was silent in his thinking.

Here was his youth coming up against the wisdom of experience, and all that he heard he could hardly believe, with the tenderness of his ideas, to be true.

"I suppose it was true enough in your case," he muttered at last. "I don't see how it could be in mine. She was your wife—that's different."

"Different, is it!" cried John Desmond. "Shure, glory be, is there ever a time in her life when a woman hasn't got to be won? Haven't ye got to make her yeer wife first, and whin ye've done that, begorra, haven't ye got to keep her? Yirra, the man who loses a woman worth having has no sympathy from me. 'Tis a damn fool he is, and that's all there is about it. Did she show ye her program?"

"Yes."

"And was it full?"

"Yes, but not—not Miss Sophie's."

"Who's then?"

"Patricia's."

If the hand of a giant had taken John Desmond by the scruff of the neck and straightened him out, he could not have become more rigid in his surprise than in that moment.

After a long pause, during which Charles Stuart stood there watching him, trembling in his heart at what he might say, his muscles relaxed and the first thing he did with his returning power of movement was to pour himself out the stiffest glass of whisky he had drunk that day.

Still he said nothing, but as it poured down his throat there came back with a tumult of thoughts into his memory the words of Mrs. Slattery the night before:

"What would ye do if some young fella proposed himself to Miss Pat tomorrow night?"

"Well, bi all the saints!" he said, voicing his thoughts. "She's a cute wan!"

"Who, Patricia?" said Charles, at once in arms to defend her.

"No, Patricia? No! Not at all. Did ye see a fat old woman shtandin' at the door as ye came in?"

"Yes, she showed me the place where I was to leave my hat and coat."

"Shure, that's the wan. Ye'd think her heart had run to fat, but it hasn't. It's the best of its kind the Almighty God ever thought fit to put into the body of a woman."

A light swept into Charles Stuart's eyes.

"I don't know what she has to do with it," said he, "but just as I was going into the dressing-room she got up on the tips of her toes and she whispered, 'Hurry!' in my ear."

John Desmond walked round the room with his laughter. "Did she!" he cried. "Did she! Now how the divvle did she know?"

He tried to work it out in his mind, and when apparently he could come to no satisfactory conclusion, he turned suddenly, coming straight to Charles.

"It's Pat, is it?" said he.

Charles nodded his head.

"D'ye know she's goin' into a convent tomorrow?"

"Yes."

"D'ye know why I've been drunk every day for the last fortnight?"

The amazement in Charles' face was sufficient answer to that.

"D'ye remember what I said just now about the way my wife was tryin' for two years to get me to hit her over the head?"

"Yes."

He said it still in amazement. There was no other answer. He did remember, but was too confused to apply the memory then.

John Desmond took him by the arm and turned his face towards the door.

"Get back," said he, "to the room and pick up as many girrls as ye can get and dance with 'em like hell, the way it 'ud seem ye'd be makin' the divvle of a time for yeerself, and when it comes to the fourteenth dance come down the drive under the trees, and the walkin' about there as if ye were sick to death of it all and wanted a while to yeerself. Do that," said he, "and don't be wastin' time askin' me questions about it. Do that, for 'tis a mere child ye are, and isn't that fat woman at the door just afther dyin' to have the nursin' of ye?"

VI

IN THE DRIVE

WHILE the thirteenth dance was still in progress, Charles Stuart went out of the house and came down the drive to where it entered the thickest part of the wood. The drive was cut through the heart of it and the trees met overhead. Light came only filtered through the leaves or where a gap met in the branches. In summertime, when the leaves were full, it was like an aisle in the interior of a great cathedral whose windows all were full of a stained or colored glass.

The moon was up that night, chasing in and out behind the clouds like a bare-backed rider galloping across the sky, and there was the circus music in the distance, that tingling sound of pianos and violins, and with it the thump of feet, coming out of the open windows of the house.

Charles stood and listened to it all, watching the reckless riding of the moon, wondering what was about to happen, debating in his mind how waiting there in that darkened drive would serve the purpose of his heart, recalling again and again John Desmond's gospel of force, and planning a thousand ways in which he yet might bring it to account, in all of which nothing but failure stared him in the face.

With a violent scraping of bows on the violins and a smashing of chords on the piano, the thirteenth dance came to an end. He could hear from there the stamping of applause and then the stillness that fell, when the soft hooting of an owl over his head was a sound intense and sharp in all that silence.

It was not until the fourteenth dance began that he could hope for anything to happen. When then the violins started their tuning once again he felt a cold breath on his forehead, just as when first he had come under the hail of fire with Miramon's troops in Mexico.

Then, no less than now, it had been a sickening wonder of what would happen in the next immediate moment of his life. The speculation of it made his heart beat in places he never thought a pulse was hid. In his throat it came, until in that silence under those trees he heard it throbbing against his breath. Indeed, this was the greatest adventure of all. It was all very well to talk of force. He felt like a pigeon in a giant's hands that night, and knew that if Patricia came to him then, even the power of his tongue would fail him.

A moment later the fourteenth dance began, and a little while after, with every sense compelled into the service of his hearing, he made out the sound of voices as they came out of the house. Two people there were, a man and a woman.

For a while, as their voices blended with the music, he could distinguish no more. They were coming down the drive. Now he could make out the resonance of John Desmond's voice. An instant later with her reply, he heard Patricia.

"Shure, ye can come and see me whin I'm received," he heard her say.

"And ye're as mad set on it as all that?" John Desmond asked her.

Eagerly Charles listened for her reply, but there was none.

"Are ye?" he repeated.

"'Tis a great thing to have a vocation," said she.

" 'Tis a great thing to have a crown on yeer head," said he, "but God knows I'd rather have a hat."

She laughed. Charles heard her laugh as they came down into the shadows of the trees, and there was that tender note in it that women have when they laugh, not so much out of their hearts, but out of the love that is in them, as though it were a place all to itself and has nothing of heartiness about it. More like the cooing of a bird it was, and at the sound of it, Charles Stuart found himself shaking from head to foot.

They came across him an instant later, walking disconsolately as he had been bid, with his head down and his hands in his pockets, for all the world as if he were sick of the gayety and noise up there.

"Who's that?" inquired John Desmond sharply, stopping with Patricia hanging affectionately to his arm as they made him out.

Charles gave his name and saw a movement of Patricia's, but could not read its meaning. John Desmond felt it, too, in the swift tightening of her fingers on his arm.

"Why are ye not dancin', man?" he asked. "Aren't they hoppin' up there like young lambs, with their fiddlers from Waterford lickin' their lips for want of a drink? Now, why the divvle did I say that?"

"Say what?" asked Patricia.

"Why the divvle did I talk about a drink, and I leavin' one shtandin' on the table, half through, the time I was routin' ye out behind that screen for the dances we were to have? Well, I've got two dances with ye, and I can't leave it wastin' there. What's more, I want me pipe, for I haven't had a smoke this evenin'."

They were poor excuses, but the light of them was clear enough to Charles. This was the chance he was to be given,

and his heart fell when he heard Patricia proposing to go back for both drink and pipe herself.

"Ye will not," exclaimed John Desmond, "ye'll shtand and talk to this poor fella has no partner at all—which is yeer own bad management, mind ye, not introducin' him is a stranger and doesn't know a soul. And ye'll wait here the time I'll be comin' back with me pipe in two minutes or less maybe, for 'tis the only dance I'll have with ye this night."

Without giving her time for another word, he left them, and though he listened with both ears alert as he walked up the drive to the house, there had been nothing but silence between them when he reached the steps.

"May the Almighty God find his tongue for him," said he as he passed into the house, "for 'tis a certain thing, surely, he's got too many words in his throat to find it for himself."

VII

PATRICIA'S VOCATION

THE moon raced out from behind a cloud and made silver on Patricia's black hair. It lit her face with mystery. To Charles Stuart, as he stood there watching her under those trees with that gash of moonlight cut across the darkness, she was like a saint it was sacrilege to touch. All the wisdom of John Desmond seemed folly to him, for in those first ecstasies of love, men and women, old and young, are like children kneeling at the feet of God.

All remembrance of her biting out her words with a high spirit at him that night when first they had met on the

Stradbally road seemed to have fallen out of the balance of his mind. He could think of her wild and untamable no longer while they stood there on the drive. But even had he recalled the fact that she herself, crying out that night for one of them there to be a man and wishing for a pole-ax in her little hands, had echoed the first principles of John Desmond's doctrine of force, it is doubtful if he could have learnt his lesson from it then.

Alone with her in that place and that darkness, and she with the moonlight in her hair, he was one hypnotized with love and could not speak. Only it seemed he could look, and with all his soul staring from his eyes like a wondering child pressing its face against the window-pane.

How is it to be known how much she knew of that amazement of the miraculous, in which he stood silent all that while, as you would suppose a man might stand in the sudden and blinding presence of God? Something she must have known, and no little too. So deep a passion of emotion as that does not confine itself alone to the heart and mind of a man who suffers the exquisite pain it brings. The air in a silence is full of it. Even a discordant noise cannot penetrate the intense ether surrounding a man and woman then. An owl screeched again in its passage over the trees as they stood there, the noise of the stamping of feet for applause after the music was still, came out of the house, but neither of these sounds reached the ears of those two, enveloped in the burning atmosphere of his emotion.

He knew it and could not speak. She knew it and dared not. For this, indeed, with little understanding of what it meant or how it would burn her when its flame was close, was what she had feared that night might threaten the beauty and sanctity of her vocation.

It must be little comprehensible to those who cannot take

into their minds the glamour of the convent life, that a child who has been brought up with a daily contemplation of it from her earliest youth should almost fear the contempt of God if she were to sacrifice the vocation which it had been His loving-kindness to graft within her mind.

Yet such had been the feelings of Patricia when, after their meeting in the woods, she came down that evening dressed in her finery to Mrs. Slattery in the kitchen. Something she knew would happen, and it was that something she had feared, when first she had taken every precaution to put it beyond her reach. What precisely there was to fear in it, she could not have said, for still it was there lingering persistently in her mind, an antagonism to this young man who, with whatever excuse, had ridden his horse to death, and in that same evening had played a galling trick upon her pride.

Nevertheless, feared it she had, and, with little consideration of the pleasure they brought her, had made her contracts and filled her program with the names of the first who had asked her to dance. Then she had believed she was safe, and quick though her heart was beating as Charles Stuart ran up those stairs, and sharp though the pain had been as he walked away, she had shown him her program as one who knows that she has sought and found immunity.

But now, here was Fate, throwing all her careful plans like leaves as playthings to the wind. She had some distant knowledge that she lay under the spell of an enchantment, but never having heard that song of the prince's sword as it sweeps through the air, bringing the mightiest of monsters to its knees, she had no desire to be set free, and just because it did not seem that freedom were even possible. Yet, if possible it were, then the bitter disappoint-

ment of God was too high a price to pay for it. But strangely now, while they stood in silence beneath the trees, something was thrilling in her heart, the sound of a distant cry that called her trembling from the purpose she had thought was deepest in her soul. The desire to answer it was like a wave dragging her out into the running sea, and still she dared not speak for fear of that contempt of God.

It was only when the silence was too full to bear a moment longer all the burning weight of speech it held, that Charles murmured her name. Only the sound of his breath came out between his lips.

"Patricia," he said, and it was only because she knew that she heard.

"What is it?" she whispered back.

He stood with his hands hanging simply at his sides, like a young man awed in the moment of his first communion.

"I love you," he said, having no other words, and if men were less conscious of their words in such an hour, they would say no more.

"I know," said she—the truest and the simplest and the most wonderful words in all the world.

This was the glisten of the sword she saw—she had not heard its song.

A long while passed before they even spoke again. And then he asked her what it meant, for that it seemed to him she must know best of them two.

"It's no good," she whispered back; "I shall be gone tomorrow."

Knowing this answer, he pleaded it must mean more to her than that.

"I've got a vocation," she replied, and like a child whose hands are full when it can hold no more. "Nothing could change that."

"Nothing?" said he.

"Nothing—unless—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless there were something I don't know of—something so—so strong that even—even if I fought against it I should be too weak to resist."

Across the mind of Charles Stuart then, and not till then, there rushed the remembrance of the look of John Desmond's hand they both had stared at. For two years his wife had tried to get him to use the weight of his arm; the only way, said he, a man is stronger than a woman. And here was her daughter now, asking for the selfsame thing, however distant was her knowledge of the demand she made. As yet it was only the glitter of the prince's sword she saw. The music of its song was what she asked for, and in that moment, Charles Stuart flung out the timid question in his soul.

"Something," he repeated, "you're too weak to resist?"

She bent her head and wondered with a quickening of her pulse at the new note his voice had struck.

"All right," said he—"all right," and once again, as they heard footsteps coming down the drive, he repeated those two words so that they sounded like a tolling bell ringing a summons in the deepest chambers of her heart.

"D'ye think I could find me pipe?" said the voice of John Desmond, coming across the darkness and reaching them where they still stood in the same place as he had left them under the trees.

"Shure, I dunno where anything is in that house this night. Didn't I think I'd get away bi myself for two minutes in the kitchen, and wasn't there some young fella kissin' a girl behind the clothes-horse and they dryin' themselves like a pair of blankets in front of the fire? 'Tis no

place for a sane man, I'm thinkin'. 'Tis either mad ye must be, or drunk and failing, that ye'd need to be twenty years of age to think ye weren't in an asylum. And here's me whole two dances gone and I niver sayin' a word to ye."

"Is the sixteenth dance beginning?" she asked.

"It is so," said he, "and there's more than one young fella with a worried look in his face, peepin' into all the corners he can find. Shure, glory be to God, I saw wan lookin' into the boot cupboard. 'There's boots in there,' says I. 'I know that,' says he; 'I was lookin' to see was there feet in 'em.'"

With an instant's sound of laughter that stopped on a sudden quickness in her throat, Patricia turned away from them.

"I must get back to the house," said she.

"Have you no dance you can give me at all?" asked Charles.

She shook her head.

"Really you've had two," she said—"two whole ones while father was after getting his pipe—two that didn't belong to ye."

"I don't mind who they belong to," said Charles.

She laughed gayly—a tenderer note than John Desmond had ever heard in her laughter before.

"If I'd made a promise to ye," said she, "would ye like me to break it?" And then, with an unexpected impulse, she turned back a step and held out her hand. "Good-by," said she. "There'll be such a rush with them all goin' at the end, I might not have time to say it then."

John Desmond stood by, looking from one to the other.

"Perdiamo il tempo con quando e dove," said Charles.

"What's that mean?" she asked.

"It's what they say in Italian," he replied, "when they

mean that time and space make no difference. It means as much as to say that time and space don't exist at all. I'll explain it better one day."

"Ah, one day," said she, and he saw the moonlight on her face one moment before she turned again and went back to the house.

John Desmond watched her out of sight. When she was gone he never looked at Charles.

"So I've got to drive her over to Rathgormuck tomorrow," said he.

"That's right," said Charles.

"Then she gets into that old shandridan they have, with an old deaf man to drive 'em, and she sits there with a pack of nuns, like a lot of squirrels in a cage, and she goes away across the hills to Clonmel."

He nodded his head backwards and forwards and for a while he stood in silence.

"Well, the Lord be with the days!" he exclaimed at last. "The young men are not the same as they were when I was a boy. I wouldn't have let her go back to the house without gettin' the worrd out of her first. I would not."

"She's promised me one thing" said Charles.

"An' what's that?"

"She'll give up her vocation if there comes something in her way she's not strong enough to resist."

"And what'll that be, shure, if ye couldn't tell it to her now, the time I'd be giving ye as good a chance as any man had ever in his life?"

In answer to that question, Charles Stuart held out his open hand. For a moment, in want of comprehension, John Desmond stared at it.

"What d'ye mean by that?" said he.

"Is there ever a time in her life," replied Charles, repeat-

ing the very words that had been said to him, "when a woman hasn't got to be won?"

John Desmond looked at the hand again, and then he seized it in his own.

"I can't help ye," said he. "Shure, amn't I under me oath, and there'd be the curse of more than Cromwell on me if I broke it a second time. I dunno what ye're sayin', mind ye, but, glory be to God, I believe ye mane it. Come along up to the house now and have a drink. I've the best reason in the worrld for takin' wan."

"What's that?" asked Charles.

"Shure, I damn well want it," said he.

VIII

THE PROSPECT

PROMISES are better out of the eyes than off the lips, better given with a grip of the hand than offered with the readiness of the tongue. Indeed, John Desmond wanted none of the latter, preferring to be in ignorance for the sake of his conscience, since it behooved him to keep to the letter of his oath when he had sworn at her birth to dedicate Patricia to a convent life.

From the wringing grip of his hand as they parted that night, when, long before the dance was over, Charles Stuart returned to Waterford, from the look no less in his eye, John Desmond was satisfied that the doctrine of his gospel of force had gone home. He did not want to know how; he never inquired in what way it was to take effect. Ignorance was truly a bliss with him then. He never believed for a moment that that farewell he had been a witness to

in the drive was to be the end of it all, and even when his own mind began to wonder on ways and means, he put the thoughts swiftly from him.

"And ye've let him go," said Mrs. Slattery to him when she caught him alone in the kitchen after Charles' departure. "Ye've let him go out of the house and ye with all yeer talk about makin' a saint of the young fella would be askin' her to marry him this night."

"I niver stopped him askin' her," said he. "Shure, wasn't it in the innocence of me heart I gave him the chance meself? There was I wantin' me pipe and the half of a glass I'd left shtandin' on the table an' it wastin'. 'I wan't be a minute,' says I to them. And whin I came back hadn't he asked her and she rejectin' him, p'int-blank, the way there could be no more words about it."

"What a fool ye are," said she, "not to be askin' her what she means by it."

" 'Tis her own choice," he replied, "and weren't ye there in the room and ye hearin' me the time I swore to Almighty God she should be a nun? Yirra, ye've tried to make me cheat the Lord God wanst and ye can try again, but I'm not listenin', mind ye. I am not! What would I be sayin' to Father Casey in the confessional the way I'd have to be tellin' him I urged her to take the young fella and kape herself out of the convent? If he can't get the worrd out of herself and he askin' her, shure, 'tis no business of mine. Faith! I believe 'tis yeerself 'ud be glad to see me burrnin' in hell, for the ungrateful woman ye are."

She went back to her duties in the dressing-room set apart for the ladies, there stitching up the rents in the frocks they brought to her, with the tears smarting in her eyes and her lips trembling with her distress.

It was near daylight when all dragged themselves to

their beds, and not until eleven o'clock the next morning did Mrs. Slattery come creeping to Patricia's room to call her. For a while she stood watching her as she slept, with her head tucked in the curve of her arm, and there was much difficulty she had in that moment to reconcile human nature with religious faith.

" 'Tis no good a fat thing like me," at last she muttered aloud—" 'Tis no good settin' me brains against the will of the Almighty God. Shure, I might talk till I was sick. 'Tis got to be, and that's all there is about it. 'Tis got to be."

Here was the fatalism of her race, overruling all the emotion and cunning of her sex. She bent her head, crossed herself, and muttered a prayer—that last admission of defeat a woman makes in the face of the inevitable; then, laying a hand upon Patricia's shoulder, she shook her gently to her last wakening in that room.

It was time she was getting up, she said, and could say no more. Words to the effect that the mare was already being harnessed for the trap came in a smothered gurgle from her lips, and she burst into tears and ran headlong from the room.

To everyone's amazement—perhaps to Patricia's most of all—John Desmond that morning was in the best of spirits.

"Aren't ye goin' on as if ye'd never see her again!" said he, when, one after another, the girls caught her in their arms. "Shure, won't we all be goin' to look at her in Clonmel a week from this day? For the Lord's sake, let her get up here beside me. We shall be late for that bevy of nuns, waitin' there in Rathgormuck as it is."

They left a cluster of women standing on the steps, all sniveling and with pocket-handkerchiefs in their hands, and the only one amongst them who was not crying was Mrs.

Slattery. Something in the high spirits of John Desmond had become a sudden astringent to her tears. She felt in his manner the premonition of something about to happen, and was caught in a wonder of what it might be. For with all the drink he had taken the night before, together with the depression of Patricia's departure, she had expected to find him with curses thick on his lips for everyone. Instead of that, there was a smile in his eyes and a joke for them all, wherefore, shrewd in her knowledge of him after all these years, she told herself the day was not over yet. Back she went into the house when the trap had passed out of sight, and to the amazement of all those whimpering girls, they found her singing in the kitchen.

Passing out of Portlaw, there was Father Casey at his gate to give her his blessing. John Desmond watched the trembling of her lips while she spoke to him.

"Ah, now that she's braced up her mind to ut," said he, with a cheerfulness that made Patricia, no less than Father Casey, look their surprise at him—"now that she's braced her mind to ut, 'tis a grand life is comin' to her. Shure, isn't ut a fine thing for a woman to be sittin' one day after another in a quiet place, the way she'd have time to be sayin' her prayers and she meditatin' on the future of her soul? It is indeed. Yirra, hasn't this pore child been goin' in the house from mornin' till night on her two feet shtandin', and she helpin' Mrs. Slattery to make the beds and cook the food and keep the place itself, and she no time even to be ridin' a horse across the fields, let alone say her prayers till the fall of night whin the legs ud be droppin' off of her? Oh, 'tis a grand life, I'm sayin', and great honor for anny girrl would be gettin' a true vocation."

Father Casey looked from one to the other, at the light

of cheerfulness in the eyes of John Desmond, to the trembling lip of Patricia, who listened in silence to all her father said.

It was not quite the way he would have painted the glorious prospect of the holy life himself. Folly it was indeed for a young girl to think that no sacrifice was needed or that she was making an exchange attached to which there could be no faint echo of regret. Even that dance the night before—and deeply had he deprecated the proposal of it—must leave in her mind some inevitable moments of comparison when once she was entered into the quiet sanctity of the convent walls. At that age no girl's vocation could be so deeply rooted in her soul as to exterminate all the fascinations of life in the days of her youth.

" 'Twill not be all so easy as she thinks," said he shrewdly, and put on his glasses as he said it, looking many of the things it best were left unsaid. For swiftly it had come into his mind, as he watched her trembling lip, that much of the romance might be taken from her if she thought there were no sacrifice at all. "She'll find it a bit lonely at first," he added.

"Lonely!" exclaimed John Desmond—"shure, won't we be seein' her for a few minutes, maybe, once a month?"

"Ye won't see her often during her probation," replied Father Casey, still watching her face with its features pinched in a set determination. He was trying to say things for the best, and, little as he could understand it, every word he uttered seemed to be wrong. John Desmond made it wrong, yet apparently his intentions were no less to help her bear the pain of this moment of departure. Still, the little priest believed firmly in the reality of her vocation. "But shure, she knows all that," said he, with a new and more cheerful intonation. "She knows well enough 'tis a life

of retreat she's going into. Faith, I wouldn't let her go if I didn't think she did."

From her high seat beside her father, Patricia smiled down at the little priest for that. It was a small, sad smile, but full of thankfulness. He had brought the vivid consciousness of her vocation back to her heart. Nothing but the contempt of God and of all those who had known her calling would fall upon her if she were to fail in that eleventh hour. She was full of gratitude to Father Casey for appreciating that moment of her weakness. She knew she had been weak. She knew her lip was trembling. But now her spirits rose to the old Patricia. She flung her head back—it kept the tears from falling out of her eyes—and she declared she knew as well as any what was expected of her.

"I'm no child," she cried; "I know what I'm givin' up."

"And 'tis not only what ye're givin' up,' cried John Desmond back at her, painting the prospect in its brightest colors to give her further strength—"begor, 'tis what ye're gainin', child! 'Tis few women have the strength of mind to take the solitary contemplation of the holy life. Now that it's come to the p'int of partin' with ye and the whole thing is inevitable, amn't I glad for the honor of ut? I am indeed. There's Sophie and those other girrls will be marryin', maybe, and they havin' the torment of children at their knees, while this child'll be able to be sittin' by herself, or with a few nice creatures of nuns by the side of her, and they with their hands quiet on their laps, the way there'd be no children callin' 'Mother' to 'em and distractin' their minds from the thoughts of their own souls. Oh, glory be to God, 'tis a fine life! Wouldn't I have gone into a monastery meself, if I hadn't been wan of thim worldly divvles, likes his home and his family and his drop

of the drink? I would so. 'Tis little hope of salvation there'll be for me, I'm thinkin'."

With that he whipped up the mare. She leapt forward on to the road to Rathgormuck, and there stood Father Casey at his gate, shading his eyes with his hand and looking after them, wondering what it was about John Desmond that made it seem to him the Lo Almighty had never intended him to be damned.

For ten minutes they drove in silence, and then of an impulse, glancing at her out of the corner of his eyes, John Desmond handed Patricia the reins.

"Take these a bit," said he quietly; " 'tis the last chance of a drive ye'll have, maybe. They won't let ye have the drivin' of their old horse, I'm thinkin', and 'tis a pore beast is thirrty years old, if they did."

He noticed her hands on the reins. Fragile, but like his they were made to handle a fractious beast and break the spirit in him. His eyes moved upwards to her face, and there was the sunlight glistening in a tear that was dragging its way down her cheek.

IX

THE SWORD OF THE PRINCE

THERE were Mother Mary Frances, Sister Mary Conception, Sister Mary Matilda, Sister Mary Joseph, and Sister Mary Louise, and three of them sat on one side of the convent conveyance and two on the other, with Patricia in between.

What coach-builder in his senses had ever built that vehicle and how long it had been made, it would have been

difficult to say. On four wheels it ran, or would have run, if any beast other than the white horse had been between the shafts. The front wheels were about half the size of those at the back, which gave it the precipitous appearance of falling forward to the horse's legs. Like the blunted keel of an old boat, there ran a well all along the bottom, and except for this excrescence, in outline it was no more than a long box, with a door at one end and two little windows, each the size of a man's head, at the other. An oblong panel at the top of the door was also fitted with glass, and over these, the only apertures in that prison of a conveyance, there were stretched on thin, iron rods, curtains of some flimsy green material. There the little Sisters sat, with their plain-shod feet in the well of that vehicle whenever there was a journey to be done—there they sat in their semi-darkness of dismal green.

Never were the curtains pulled, except on a lonely road, when a tap of Rafferty's whip on the side was intended to convey the information that no one was in sight.

They were pulled quickly enough then, and many were the little Sisters whose hearts had lifted to a brighter measure with the white daylight that flooded in, and many were the pairs of eyes that had peered through those tiny windows upon the world toiling so slowly by as the wheels rumbled beneath their feet.

Rafferty was the character in that company, for as the years go by behind convent walls all Sisters become the same. So long have they shared in common the convent's possessions, even down to the pair of scissors they brought with them for their sewing when they left the world, that their natures have become woven into one plain pattern, like a flight of old steps the countless passing feet have worn into the hollow tread. Character in a nun peeps out as

seldom as the little wisp of hair that sometimes escapes the bondage of the stiff linen coif. It is by their names you know them, and when a glimpse of character is to be seen, you may be sure the Sister in whom it appears is young to her vows.

When God accepts the offerings of these gentle creatures, He takes their bodies and souls and characters and all, and puts them into that box which contains His angels that are to be, where they rub together like pebbles in a stream, until after a time there is scarce a speck to choose between them. Those of them who, despite all this, still keep their corners become Reverend Mothers—the round ones are Sisters till they die.

So it happened that Rafferty indeed was the character in that company. He was gardener and coachman—in fact, was man in general about the place. To obtain such a post as that in a convent establishment requires certain qualifications, which only a few are able to declare. Rafferty with honesty declared them all. He was crippled with rheumatism, wholly deaf in one ear and partly in the other. There was a cast in his left eye; he did not smoke and had never touched a drop of alcohol in his life.

A knowledge of horses argues at some age or another a certain lassitude towards the moral obligations. John Desmond, for instance, was no saint. But of even a knowledge of horses Rafferty had none, and the white mare scarcely needed it. She pulled the convent conveyance whatever way the harness was put on, and after a year or two in the service of the nuns, Rafferty came to find the best way of contriving it, which was no doubt the right way if the truth were known.

He had never been married, and at the time that Patricia made her journey from Rathgormuck to Clonmel was sixty-

three years of age, and older to look at by reason of his aches and pains.

"Shure, I niver want to have nothin' to do with the women," he was known to have said, in his almost falsetto voice, wherefore it seemed like the visitation of Fate that he was employed by the Reverend Mother and Father McCormack, the convent chaplain, to fulfill the duties of outdoor servant to a community of nuns.

Up and down those wild country roads, between Rathgormuck and Clonmel, he drove the white mare from one year to another, up and down the beds in the convent garden he worked with a spade and a fork, talking only when spoken to and never voicing any opinions of his own unless pressed to speak his mind. Notwithstanding that he lived in the world, in a cottage close to the convent gates, he was more of a recluse than any of the Sisters.

Once, when it must have been curiosity that moved her, the Reverend Mother asked him what he thought about from one day to another.

"One day I thinks 'tis goin' to rain," said he, "and the next I'd be wonderin' what a fool I was for thinkin' it."

"And nothin' else?" said she.

"Ah," said he, and left her more curious than ever.

From Rathgormuck to Clonmel it is close on twelve miles, for the road after Curraghkiely winds in a tortuous passage through the lonely passes of the Curragh Mountains. To Curraghkiely, four miles off, it is as straight as a lathe, and down that stretch of road that afternoon there was never a tap of Rafferty's whip on the side of the coach, for the simple reason that Rafferty himself was almost asleep and neither knew nor cared whether there were folks about or not.

After five miles of it, an hour's journey for the white

mare, there came a violent tap on the window which woke him with a jerk in his box-seat.

"That's Mother Mary Frances," said he aloud, and responded at once with a bang of his whip, without raising his eyes or taking notice of a horse and trap a quarter of a mile further along the road.

They had started late upon their journey, and, inside, the Sisters had been begging Mother Mary Frances to tap on the window and see whether Rafferty had forgotten them. The sun would be setting over the mountains, they said, and wouldn't it be a pity to be losin' the lovely sight of it. Mother Mary Frances wanted to see it no less than they, for the solitary life encourages a love of sunsets. God does all things for those who live in convents. He paints their pictures, and with a sunset uses such colors as are vivid with emotion to their timid souls.

She waited, however, until they had asked her, each one in their turn, then she had looked at Patricia. It was a tender consideration for the one just newly come amongst them that made her ask if she would like the curtains drawn.

"I would," said Patricia meekly, and after that immediate response of Rafferty's whip, when the golden wealth of the sun that was dropping behind the purple ridges flooded their cramped compartment, the sighs and murmurs of the little Sisters were like the chorus of birds in a cage at feeding-time.

From one to the other, Patricia looked at them, wondering how soon it would be before she was like them all—wondering how many months or years must pass before she shared with them the beauties of the sunset, and thinking how many times she had sat alone by the stream that rises in the hill of Cronghaun watching the sun going to

its rest, when sometimes it had seemed as if it was bidding good-night to her alone in all the world.

One tap of Rafferty's whip was the signal that the road was clear, two taps and the curtains were speedily drawn again, at which the little Sisters would fold their hands in their laps and all liveliness of expression would vanish from their faces. You would not have thought that even one of them could be so much as wondering who it was that was passing by.

Scarcely a minute had passed that evening after Rafferty's first tap, when the double signal they all dreaded followed it. With the automatic precision of a machine, the curtains were pulled, the hands of the little Sisters crossed on their laps, and they sat once more in the dismal green darkness, that was tantalizing to the more trembling heart of Patricia, when she thought of the generous light of the day outside.

Indeed, the drive in that conveyance, with its drawn curtains and its cramped confinement, was the severest test to which her trust in her own vocation could have been put. Used as she was to the open fields and a bare-backed horse to ride on, nothing the ingenuity of the wisest Reverend Mother might have thought of could have been a greater ordeal to her than this.

All the time since they had started she had been thinking how much faster she would have been able to make that white mare move; moreover, thinking it persistently in order to silence the memories that were knocking eagerly at the door of her mind. There was one memory, however, she could not keep back, the creaking of the springs had it in their note, the bumping of the wheels cried it aloud, and the falling of the white mare's hoofs on the metal of the road beat it with their ceaseless hammering into her brain.

"All right—all right—all right!"

This was the refrain of them all. Concentrate as she might with all the force of her will upon the pace of the old white mare, these words of Charles Stuart's the night before, no less than the strange tone in which he had said them, were everywhere in the sounds about her.

"All right—all right—all right!"—so the old conveyance went bumping along the road. When the blinds were pulled again she began wondering whether the sounds of the springs, the hammering of the horse's hoofs, were beating memories into the ears of those silent Sisters sitting opposite to her. Suddenly, then, there was the sharp sound of a man's voice outside, and with a jerk the conveyance came to a standstill.

For a moment or so the little Sisters sat there in silence, a thousand questions glancing from one to the other under the lashes of their eyes. For this was against all the strictest rules and regulations, that Rafferty should stop talking to anyone on the roadside. Mother Mary Frances tapped peremptorily on the glass of the window, and when this had no effect, she peeped out through a chink in the curtain, when the little Sisters and even Patricia held their breath.

"It's a man is standin' there talkin'!" she exclaimed. "Tim Rafferty will lose his job for this."

A while longer they sat and listened, and now with the voices that were raised to a higher pitch, they heard Rafferty on his falsetto note declaring that it was as much as his place was worth to get down and be talking to the Sisters in there while they'd be standin' on the high road.

"Well, either you must do that," said another and a deeper voice, "or I must go and open the door myself. Come on! Get down off your box! It's no good behaving like an old woman, if you've got to talk like one. I'm not here to

frighten the Sisters, and I'm not here to waste time. Come on! Down you get!"

At the sound of that voice, the breath in Patricia's throat was broken with a gasp. With the cessation of movement those two repeating words had ceased their hammering in her brain, to come in that moment, it seemed, to their fulfillment. For now, with a sudden bursting of light, she felt she knew what he had meant.

The next instant, Rafferty was standing at the open door, and one and all they were peering out on to the road and every heart was thumping under those black-cloth gowns.

"If ye plaise, Mother Frances," said he, "there's a man is shtandin' on the road with a thrap and horse he has, and he sayin' he's come to fetch the young lady is come from Portlaw this afterneoon."

Patricia's cheeks were not scarlet, they were white, as white as the coifs and gimps of the little Sisters all about her. It was the cheeks of Mother Mary Frances that burnt to a dull crimson, and for quite a while, with the anger that overwhelmed her, it was impossible for her to reply.

"What—what does he want her for?" she demanded.

"Shure, he didn't say. 'I'm takin' her away in the thrap,' says he, and that's all. Faith, he's got a determined way with him. I don't like the looks of him at all. I've niver had anything to do with women all me life and I've had less to do with men. I don't like the look of him at all."

"Tell him—tell him," spluttered Mother Frances, "that he had better come and tell me what he wants."

"He said he wouldn't like to disturb ye."

"Isn't this disturbance enough already!" she cried, and indeed it was. The little Sisters were fluttering like frightened pigeons on whom the eyes of a cat are resting.

Alternately they peered out on the road and stole glances at Patricia, who sat huddled between the two nuns like one in the stupor of a dream.

While Rafferty was away giving her message, Mother Frances pulled at the sleeves of her habit and shook them on her arms. She too was like a bird in her perturbation ruffling out her feathers and preparing to defend her young.

After a silence amongst them, which to those bursting hearts seemed an eternity, a shadow fell across the open doorway, and there stood Charles Stuart. In that first instant, he met the eyes of Patricia, and when she saw the glitter of determination in his, her own fell down before them. They did not look at each other again.

"What is the—the—the——?" began Mother Frances.

"The meaning of this, Mother," said Charles quietly—"the meaning is that I've got no time to waste, and I've come to fetch this young lady here."

"What for, may I ask?" gasped the nun in her astonishment.

"Because I'm in love with her," said he, "and I've reason to believe she's in love with me. She thinks she's got a vocation, but she hasn't. She's no more the sort that ought to go into a convent than I am."

Mother Frances looked at Patricia. So did they all.

"Is this true, Patricia?" she asked.

"No," muttered Patricia under her breath, and her head was still bent and her eyes were fixed upon the floor.

"Can ye hear what she says?" said Mother Frances. "And that's yeer answer. Now, if ye've anny feelin's of a gintleman at all, ye'll put an end to this disgraceful conduct and go."

"I hear what she says," replied Charles, "but I don't believe her, and I'm not going till she comes with me. If

you want better reason, I must go so far as to betray a confidence and tell you that last night she said to me, if there was something so strong that she could not resist she would give up her vocation. Well, she can't resist this, because I'm going to take her. It's stronger than all the vocations she'll ever get in her life."

"That's blasphemy!" cried Mother Frances.

"It may be," said he—"some truths are."

It was then that Patricia jumped to her feet.

"I'll settle this, Mother Frances!" she cried out, when the poor Sister stretched out a despairing hand to detain her. "Let me stand out there on the road. I can't talk to him sitting in here."

They let her go. There was that in her voice—the high spirit of John Desmond, perhaps—which they felt could not be denied.

"Now!" she said, when she was out there standing on the road beside him and her eyes were flashing back into his. "Ye think ye're stronger than all the thoughts I've had in me mind, ever since I was young! I dare ye to take me now, the way I'd be hatin' ye for the rest of me life!"

"We'll see about that," says he, and in the flash of a moment she found herself a mere bundle in his arms, kicking and struggling, it is true, but as helpless in that embrace as if she were a baby. Over the road to the trap he carried her, with all the nuns now crying out like a flock of frightened geese. Up in the air he lifted her, holding her, still struggling, across his knees while he took his seat in the trap.

There was a moment when it seemed to him the task was impossible, that he would never be able to get the reins in his hands or set them going down the road. A struggling woman, though she may do no harm, is suffi-

cient interference to any course of action. But just as he was stretching for the reins she lay still, and then, when he got the horse started, she began her struggles again.

It was a comparatively easy matter now to hold her with one hand and drive with the other, for her struggles were less than he had expected them to be. So they started off down the road, away towards the height of Ravens Rock, and there behind them, like a little cluster of black crows, with the white mare in their midst, stood the little Sisters looking after them.

Not more than a hundred yards had they gone when Patricia called out that she could bear that position no longer.

"Let me sit on the seat!" she cried.

"You'll jump out," said he.

"Perhaps I shall," she replied.

"Then you can stay where you are," he told her.

After another fifty yards, she promised she would not jump out. He let her slip to her feet and helped her to the seat beside him.

"I do hate you!" she exclaimed when she was free.

"I've expected that," he replied. "You were bound to hate me. I must put up with that till I can get better."

"Ye'll never get better from me," she muttered.

"Well, anyhow, 'tis better than nothing at all," said he.

After a long spell of silence, she asked him how he had come out on that road. He explained his leaving the dance early the night before, how he had gone back to Waterford and hired the trap, and come out to that place where he had been waiting.

"Ye meant to do it, then," said she.

"I did," he replied—"after what you said last night."

Again the sound of his words, "All right—all right!"

came back into the swinging of the trap and the beat of the horse's hoofs.

"Ye've got the divvle's own will," said she. "And where are ye takin' me, please?"

"To Dungarvan—there's a boat waiting there; I know the Captain. We shall be in England this time tomorrow and married—as soon as you like."

"I won't do it!" she exclaimed.

"I'll wait till you do," said he.

"Oh, I do hate you!" she cried again.

"I expected that," he repeated.

She fell exasperated in silence after this, but all that time there was singing in her ears the music of the prince's sword. It came in the note of the humming wheels, in the beat of the horse's hoofs, in the free, faint song of the wind as it sped them by. Involuntarily she thought of the dismal green light inside the convent conveyance; no less involuntarily she drew a deep breath as these thoughts passed across her mind. Then she fell to comparing the horse before her with the old white mare doing its five miles an hour with the reins in Rafferty's hands.

With that consideration she snatched a glance at Charles Stuart's hands, holding the reins, and despite herself she smiled when she saw the way he clutched them.

"Ye don't know how to drive," said she.

"I can't help that," said he. "We're getting there. If you hadn't started so late from Rathgormuck we'd have plenty of time to spare."

" 'Twasn't I started late," said she; then a moment later she put out her hand.

"Give me the reins," said she.

He set his face lest he should smile, and gave them at once into her hands. Immediately they were in her grip

the horse set forward with a quicker step. He smothered a smile again.

"We may get there in time at this pace," said he. "It makes a devil of a lot of difference who holds the reins."

"This horse," said she, "could go twice as fast if he wanted to."

At which she took the whip out of its socket and flicked the horse on its neck. The animal bounded forward, and out of the corner of his eye Charles saw the look of pleasure that had come into her face.

"Patricia," he said presently.

"What is it?" she asked.

"I love you," he replied, exactly as he had done the night before.

She made no answer such as she had given him then, but taking out the whip again and in silence, she flicked the horse on the neck once more.

X

JOHN DESMOND COMES INTO HIS KINGDOM

JOHN DESMOND kept the height of his spirits for so long as he was in sight of Patricia, with her trembling lip and that betraying glitter in her eye. But with every mile as he drove back alone along the road to Portlaw, depression set upon him, unsparing in its revenge. He came back into the house with heavy looks and a good word for no one.

They were setting the house to rights again. From one room to another he went for solitude and his comfort, swearing at them all. There was no comfort to be found

except in the kitchen, and there by the fire he sat, shouting at Mrs. Slattery to get him his drink.

She brought it on the tray and stood there before him, less afraid of his tempers than any left in that house now that Patricia was gone.

"What's on ye?" she demanded, with no little temper rising in herself, for she guessed how things must have gone badly for the hope in both their hearts. "What's on ye at all?" she repeated—"ye goin' out of the house as if ye were goin' to a weddin', and comin' back the way ye'd buried a corpse itself."

He gave her not one word in answer till he had brewed his drink, and politely enough she waited in full knowledge that that word must come.

"Has anythin' happened at all?" she asked, to give him matter for his answer when once he had taken a draught of his brew.

"Nothing has happened," he growled—"not a damned thing at all!"

"Did ye expect something?"

"I did indeed."

"What did ye expect?"

"Shure, I dunno. And, begor, 'tis the way I didn't want to know. 'Tis the deuce of a conscience I have, and wouldn't it have been accusin' me of takin' a hand in it and breakin' me vows to the Almighty God? I kept me fingers out of the whole thing, and 'tis too late now. 'Tis inside those walls at Clonmel she'll be this night, and once she gets the ways of it there's nothing'll move her. Shure, there's more food and drink a woman can get out of one prayer than I'd find in a whole bowl of this stuff, and 'tis more than one bowl I shall want this night before me head'll go down on me pillow."

"Yirra, what could he have done?" cried Mrs. Slattery.

When last night was over, didn't I know it was too late then?"

"Had it been meself," said John Desmond, "I'd have gone straight to Rathgormuck, and I'd have pitched a tale to the Mother there would have kept that child out of the convent if she'd come to it on her two knees bendin'—I would so. Didn't she as good as tell him she'd give up her vocation if a' be there was something stronger came in the way? Yarra, wasn't that invitation enough for any man to whip her up in his arms there and then and make no more nonsense about it? Shure, hadn't I been tellin' him meself there's only one way a man is stronger than a woman, and that's with his fisht? I had so. Faith, I've got no patience with the young men of this generation. They're lettin' the women get the upper hand of them entirely. Isn't it got to make the bread he has, and, begor, she won't have him unless he shows enough strength in his arm to shtraighten out the first man that comes agin him. And there's only one way for a man makin' love to a woman, for him to show her that."

"What way's that?" said Mrs. Slattery.

He looked up at her as though she was a fool.

"Catch her round the middle," said he, "and take her off her feet, and if ye ever get a man doin' that to ye," he added, " 'tis a fine long arm he'll have and a shtrong fella he'll be into the bargain, and 'tis well ye'd be to be takin' him quick before his arm is tired."

He talked no little wisdom as he sat there that evening drinking his punch and insisting on the presence of Mrs. Slattery, who stood there for some hours together, watching him get drunk.

"There's no man," was one of the things he said, when the punch had got hold of him—"there's no man can match his wits agin the woman is worth her salt. Yirra, she'll

beat him every time. Shure, there's only one thing she can't wriggle out of," said he, "and that's the grip of his hand, and the more she knows it, the less she'll want to get away."

They talked there till it was dark, but he would have no lamps lighted, he said.

"I can bear best what I've got in the dark," said he, but presently there came one of the girls with a lighted candle in her hand, saying that Father Casey was at the door and he in a perspiration with his mare sweating under him.

"Show him in here," said John Desmond. "I'm in no fit state to be shtandin' on me feet."

They brought the little man in, still breathless with the ride he had made down the hard road.

"Glory be to God!" said he, as he entered the kitchen. "Didn't I tell ye 'twas a wild idea to be havin' a dance for that child and she goin' into the convent the next day?"

"What's happened her?" asked John Desmond, and despite the statement about his condition, he leapt to his feet.

"There's some man has taken her," gasped Father Casey—"and she on the road with the nuns to Clonmel. Shure, never was there such a scandal in these parts all the time I've been parish priest in this place."

"Where did he take her?" asked Mrs. Slattery.

" 'Twas a mile beyond Curraghkeily, on the mountain road. There he was with a trap ready and all, and they've taken the road to Dungarvan."

"Did she go willin'? asked John Desmond.

"She did not. The nuns sent word to me. There she was kickin' and strugglin', and he catchin' her up in the power of his arms."

There was one look that passed between Mrs. Slattery and John Desmond, and one look was enough.

"Well, what can I do?" he asked, standing there and

swinging like a pendulum backwards and forwards on his feet.

"What can ye do?" cried Father Casey. "Yirra, glory be to God, isn't she yeer own child and ye can stand there askin' me that. Shure, get the best horse ye've got in the stables, man, and ride to Dungarvan. If he gets her on a boat there and is off with her, she's lost."

"Begor, I'll find her," said John Desmond, and he went out into the stable-yard, shouting for the boy to fetch his horse.

In less than five minutes he was rolling in the saddle and cursing in a fine temper at anything that came in his way.

"I'll find her," he shouted. "But if she'll treat me like that, I'm damned if I'll have the girrl back in me house again unless she begs me to take her."

Shaking in every part of her, Mrs. Slattery ran to his side as he turned to go out of the yard.

"Tell her," she whispered—"tell her——"

"Oh, shure, I'll know what to tell her," he whispered back, and he galloped out on to the drive. They heard the rattle of his horse's hoofs making thunder out there in the darkness.

"There's no man with the drink in him I'd trust to ride a horse on a dark night like himself," said Mrs. Slattery as she came back into the kitchen. "'Tis a grand man he is," she added, "and a great gintleman."

It was long before they got to bed that night. Never was there so much chattering in Waterpark before, as they all sat in the kitchen, wondering who it could be had taken Patricia away. At last they went to their rooms, and only the good woman, Mrs. Slattery, sat waiting up in the hope of her master's return.

She did not wait in vain.

Not long after midnight she caught the sound of horse's hoofs coming at a canter up the drive, and was at the hall-door as fast as her legs would carry her.

"How is it ye're back so soon?" she called out into the darkness.

There was no answer, but at the sound of a voice the horse stood still, and shivered and panted in the bitterness of its distress. With a cry on her lips, the good woman ran down the steps. Something was hanging like a garment from the stirrup, dragging there on the ground. She bent over it with a chill and a pain at her heart, and found the body of John Desmond come thus in no mean way into his kingdom.

XI

A TAILPIECE

IT is characteristic of the fairy tale that it tells no more than it need. When once the princess is set free of the spell of enchantment in whose thrall she has been held, there is an end, the big issues are decided, and it is only the big issues a fairy story concerns itself to relate.

"Once upon a time," says the fairy tale, "there was a king of a great country——" And wastes no moment with genealogical trees or such contrivances to tell you how he came to be sitting on his throne.

And that, no doubt, is the way to tell a story. There is no need to describe that passage across the water from Dungarvan to the bleak coast of Wales, no purpose in relating that first moment when Charles Stuart took Patricia in his arms.

To the shrewd reader it surely was sufficient when, declaring she could speak the better to him outside the convent conveyance, Patricia had descended and stood beside him on the road. No vastly superior knowledge of women was required to see what she intended by that. If he had the strength to convey her struggling to the trap, it was much more convenient that he took her where she stood, than having to scramble for her over the laps of a lot of nuns.

A woman will always save a man's dignity for him if she wants to love him afterwards, just as surely as it is the first thing she will rob him of when her heart is her own.

That standing out in the road, then, was signal enough for the end of any fairy tale such as we want to read. But this story is of the modern order. The listening children ask more questions today. So it is our story is carried on until Patricia takes the whip in her hand and flicks it over the horse's neck, lest they come too late into Dungarvan. And in such a mood no more demonstration of affection can be asked of a woman than that. Once she took the reins in her hand, increasing the pace by at least three miles an hour, what else could there be for those two but happiness that is ever after?

And with John Desmond—well, kings as well as men must die, and who better fitted in this story was there than he for a strenuous death in the full tide of his cups and in the very hour of his deliverance?

Here we are, then, with the elm log burnt and that winter fire turning to the gray ashes. Let's light our candles so, and get to bed.

Akad
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